

POSTDOC APPRECIATION WEEK 2024_Notes

Launching an Academic Career- Panel Discussion (Sep. 18).

Moderator:

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1. Discussion:

The discussion focused on strategies for postdocs transitioning to academic roles. Key points included the importance of validating experiments and developing leadership skills through problem-solving and deep work. Dr. Eric Moore emphasized the value of demonstrating leadership without organizing symposiums. Dr. Jeffrey highlighted the importance of mentorship and the blend of research and teaching responsibilities. Dr. Anne stressed the need for a strong CV, cover letters, and networking. Dr. Natasha advised on leveraging LinkedIn and other job search tools. The panel also discussed the significance of cultural fit and diversity and the importance of patience and flexibility in the job search process.

How do you position yourself in a job?

- Think about the unique contributions your work can provide to an institution. If necessary, step back and think big.
- Publish your work and talk about what you do in a meaningful way.
- Nourish new and unique ideas and think about how to embark on them.

How can postdocs manage to publish during short-time appointments?

- “Deep work in a distracting world.”
- Work on time management and productivity.
- Book- Slow Productivity: The Lost Art of Accomplishment Without Burnout by Cal Newport.

How do you manage time and be productive?

- Do not be reactive to a situation. Think first, then take action.
- Walk, don't run.
- Sometimes, simple is more.

How can postdocs grow and develop during their positions to position themselves in Academia?

- Learn new things.
- Be competitive.
- Work on skills or knowledge that differentiates you from your supervisor and colleagues.
- Show interest and passion in what you are doing.

What about training in leadership skills? Is this required?

- Remember what your actual position brings to the table:
- Are you leading a project?
- Are you solving problems?
- Are you guiding students?
- Are you giving talks or participating in conferences?

Research topics:

- Find an applicable solution to a current problem.
- Do DEEP research.
- Find things that matter to research about.
- Do original work:
- Design, innovate.
- Be independent
- Work on exciting projects.

How can postdocs create opportunities to be innovative and independent?

- Find collaboration with other universities, colleges, or investigators.
- Participate in other projects- Interdisciplinary collaboration.

Teaching experience:

- Should you teach your research or other topics?
- You might be teaching both things.

How do you develop teaching skills?

- Register for short courses.
- Participate in guest lectures.
- Applied to be a teacher assistant.
- Talk with your supervisor about opportunities in your department or with other colleagues.

Suggestions for a successful interview (How do you stand out?):

- Identify the right job opportunities for you. Do your homework! Research the institution you are applying to (mission, vision, work ethics, “Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion” EDI).
- Faculty members seek colleagues driven to work independently and bring something different to the team.
- They look for equals and professionals.
- “Be like the coworker you would like to share work with.”
- Recruiters will consider your plan preparedness for the job:
- Do you have project ideas?
- Do you already have a project idea ready to propose for funding?
- Ask mentors about the desirable attributes they are looking for in candidates.
- What are you missing?
- How can you improve?
- Grow and develop the required attributes to strengthen your CV.

Tools to prepare for a good interview:

- Rely on your supervisor and mentors for feedback on your application.
- Demonstrate your research philosophy by showing your work and attributes.
- Ask for advice from colleagues and institutions to see if you would be a good fit for the job.
- Networking is essential (conferences, mixers, LinkedIn).
- Think of your interview as “the performance of your lifetime. Give your best with no regrets.”
- Papers on preparing for a job search and interview are available online.
- Jumping through opportunities, is it advised?
- It depends. Sometimes, you will learn in the process.

2. Key takeaways:

- Be open to grow and develop yourself and find the place you want to be.
- Search for jobs where you can do things that you love doing.
- Job searching is a job. Advice:
- Be clear about your research and teaching philosophy.
- Work on your mentorship experience.
- Do not stop building your network. This is helpful to get letters of reference.
- Letters of reference are important during the recruiting process.
- Remember to value the mentor-postdoc relationship.
- Be flexible, open-minded, and optimistic during the interview.
- Use job search tools to stay informed about job opportunities and negotiate salaries.

- Remember the value of attending conferences and engaging with colleagues to build an identity and stay informed about job opportunities.
- Remember that we work in a competitive environment. “Comparison is the killing of joy.”
- Be passionate and creative about what you do (job, research). Show interest!
- Do not stop growing your skills and knowledge. Be prepared to leave jobs that don't suit your goals.
- Mentorship is greatly important.
- Position and brand yourself:
- Publish in high-impact journals.
- Develop new research ideas.
- Do not exhaust and overwhelm yourself. Only do what you can manage. Remember that you can politely reject.
- Point out EDI statements during job applications and interviews.
- Book- The Professor is In by Karen Kelsky. “The Essential Guide To Turning Your Ph.D. Into a Job.”

3. Closing remarks:

- The panellists highlighted the importance of patience, timing, and persistence during the job search, as well as the importance of social connections and building a solid academic network.
- Dr. Anne emphasized the need for well-crafted job applications and the value of mentors in the job search process.
- Dr. Eric Moore advised about flexibility, staying positive, and engaging with a community of peers in the same career stage.

Take advantage of the Professional Development resources the College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (CGPS) provides. <https://cgps.usask.ca/grad-life/student-resources/professional-development.php>:

- Individual Development Plan (IDP).
- Career Progression Skills.
- Career Exploration.
- Level UP_CGPS. Browse and sign up for development opportunities.

4. Panelists:

- Maureen Reed, Professor, School of Environment and Sustainability UNESCO Co-Chair in Biocultural Diversity, Sustainability, Reconciliation and Renewal University of Saskatchewan Distinguished Professor.
- Jeffrey McDonnell, Professor School of Environment and Sustainability Associate Director Global Institute for Water Security.
- Natasha Hubbard, Assistant Professor, College of Nursing.
- Eriq Lukong, Assistant Dean, College of Medicine Professor Biochemistry, Microbiology & Immunology.
- Eric Moore Jossou, Assistant Professor, Nuclear Science and Engineering at MIT PhD Alum, College of Engineering.
- Justin Botterill, Assistant Professor Anatomy, Physiology, & Pharmacology.
- Ann R. C. Martin, Associate Professor and Graduate Chair.

Panel Summary: Resilience, Skills, and Career Transitions

Summary

The panel discussed the importance of resilience and mental grit in academic and professional pursuits. Emphasis was placed on developing transferable skills, such as project management, adaptability, and communication, when transitioning from academia to industry. Dr. Krista highlighted soft skills like leadership and problem-solving as crucial for securing roles in the private sector. Dr. John advised leveraging mentorship and professional development opportunities to aid career growth. Additional discussion points included achieving work-life balance, the value of networking, and the challenges surrounding job security across various sectors. The panellists collectively stressed the importance of intentional skill development and strategic career planning.

Action Items

- Organize a special session through a professional society.
- Explore mentorship and professional development platforms (e.g., Beyond the Professoriate).
- Practice storytelling and personal branding for interviews using techniques such as STAR.

Outline

Resilience and Mental Grit in Academia

- Emphasis on using varied paths to build professional positioning.
- Questions about the limits of resilience in academia.
- Emphasis on mental grit, self-awareness, and maintaining control over one's approach.

Balancing Skills and Opportunities

- Speakers discussed the understanding of personal limits and skill sharpening.
- Concerns about chasing dream roles vs. sticking to one track were discussed.
- One speaker encouraged lifelong learning and discussed the usefulness of all knowledge.
- The importance of transferable skills that must be demonstrated across roles.

Transitioning from Academia to Industry

- One invitee shared her journey, emphasizing risk-taking and professional references.
- She underscored soft skills and the value of experiences beyond academia.
- Understanding different work cultures was cited as essential preparation.

Communication and Transferable Skills in Industry

- Speakers emphasized leadership, teamwork, and self-awareness.
- Project management and adaptability are key elements.
- Cultural awareness and communication were highlighted as industry essentials.

Mentorship and Professional Development

- One speaker shared how mentoring and volunteering contributed to his career.
- He stressed branding and crafting a compelling personal narrative.

Balancing Work and Life

- One panellist prompted discussion on time management strategies.
- Another recommended task prioritization and the confidence to refuse or decline certain activities.
- Others highlighted transparency with employers and maintaining boundaries.

Job Security and Career Paths

- Panellists discussed the myth of job security and the need for skill evolution.
- Government roles were noted as not always secure; wellness and health were emphasized.

Networking and Building Relationships

- One speaker explored postdoc transitions and the importance of networking.
- Effective self-marketing and networking as relationship-building were encouraged.
- Cold calls and preparation for conferences were advised.

Approaching Multiple Perspectives

- One panellist recommended openness, quality applications, and soft skills for balance.

Final Advice and Takeaways

- Authenticity and compelling storytelling.
- Value of self-knowledge and leveraging one's journey.
- Focus on strengths and control over choices.
- Importance of intentional learning and skill-building.