Summary of “Exploring Careers in Consulting and Industry”
Pathways to Success and 5th annual BEST Symposium June 6, 2018

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After brief self-introductions, panelists were asked several starter questions on their careers by the moderator. Key points in their training and experience helped them decide what they wanted to do. They each shared tidbits of advice for current graduate students and postdocs at Cornell.
• Pick apart what makes you happy, what you like to do every day
  o Do you like to write? Orally present? Advocate? Analyze?
  o Do you like to solve ambiguous problems?
  o Do you prefer to work with people? Data?
  o Would you prefer to live in a big city?
  o Do you like working in fast-paced changing environments, with new projects each week or month? Or do you prefer stability and security, to delve deeply into a topic over a longer term?
  o Think about what you are passionate about: Improving people’s lives? Changing thinking? Unearthing new data?
  o Be honest about what’s important to you regarding your job. Do you want to be an expert in one area? Do you like working on teams?

Ask yourself: why do you want your PhD?

• The PhD is a tool to think, write and provide the groundwork for your future.
• An undergraduate internship at Corning helped me realize that everyone I worked for had a PhD, so I would need that to advance in my career. This gave me a purpose for why I wanted to get my degree.
• But a PhD isn't absolutely necessary for an industry career; you have to give more thought to what you want to be doing and talk with people who do this work.
• I realized in my 2nd or 3rd year that I wasn’t good at coming up with my own thing. But I have skills in thinking strategically, knowing what questions to ask, working with the people who do the lab work, and communicating with regulators, clinicians, clients.

Employers look for three major skills in the people they hire. These skills are all transferrable into all sorts of careers like consulting, industry, intellectual property law, and more.

1. Communication
  • Presentation skills are essential. Guaranteed a good presentation will set you apart from all other PhD applicants who typically do a terrible job.
    o Be prepared; present at the right speed; use metaphors; practice!
    o Have a talk ready for all occasions and timeframes: 1 hour, 40 minutes, 10 minutes, 2 minutes, and even thirty seconds to tell people what you do
    o Be ready to talk up (to hold your own among scientists) and down (e.g. to a general council that has no science background). Know how to present without making the non-technical people feel dumb.
    o Learn to read your audience: do they get what you’re saying?
    o Write a review paper-become an expert goober to find information and extract the pertinent information to a project; know how to distinguish credible references
    o Create a story with recommendations so the listener/reader buys into what you are saying

2. Critical Thinking
  • Formulate a hypothesis, know where to find data, analyze, and change your hypothesis based on the results: this is what you do during your PhD.
    o The ability to try → interpret → find other options → try again …Don't give up!
Focus on what’s important to include, relevant to the topic. Set up a rubric for how to decide this.
- What is the impact of the work to the problem at hand?
- Why not do it another way? What has worked before, what are the weaknesses?
- What is the quickest, most cost effective solution?

3. **Project Management**
- The ability to set up a roadmap, a timetable, collect and communicate results—whether good or bad—and come up with a new solution
- Can you tap into expertise needed in other fields outside yours?
- Synthesizing lots of information into a cohesive plan
- Follow-through!

**Collective Advice for Grad Students and Postdocs:**

- Take advantage of opportunities: embrace them! Just do it, don’t settle for the easy path by default, but take the time to explore, try things. Seek out industry conferences to attend or present a poster: you’ll be the star, the only grad student and everybody will remember you.
- Seek out others for mentorship: high school students, undergrads, fellow graduate students. Remember mentoring goes both ways.
- Know thy neighbor: at the table, in the room. Introduce yourself to people you don’t know. Develop relationships now with your peers-everyone keeps on growing, and this will be your network of the future. Eat or have coffee with them, keep in touch: use LinkedIn, texting, coffee or wine! Put yourself out there, and read about others.
- Be sure to emphasize work-life balance. Keep time for sports, hobbies: it’s important to take a break to not burn out—you’ll be more productive.
- Address your imposter syndrome. Read Barking Up the Wrong Tree by Eric Barker. Be purposeful and confident to put yourself out there.
- Remember, where you go for your first job doesn’t define your whole life. Go ahead and try, then switch. There’s no pressure to get it absolutely right, and you will learn from all experiences.
- Networking is important! It takes work, effort, invested energy. Maintain a relationship with your mentor. Recommendations come from this and other connections.
  - My mentor was David Lin. That’s why I am speaking today.
  - Exponent was invited today due to a previous BESTie.
- Don’t be myopic about a view of what is success: periodically re-evaluate what makes you happy. Life offers many choices; take advantage of all of them.
- Remember a career is a marathon, not a sprint. Life circumstances change, workplaces change, technology changes, new opportunities arise.
- Be open to exploring new avenues.