The Cornell BEST program in 5 Q&As

Q: What is the Cornell BEST program?

A: BEST (Broadening Experiences in Scientific Training) is an NIH-funded initiative supported in 17 universities.

It is a resource available for graduate students and postdocs to develop skills not conventionally taught in academic life.

Knowledge and skills trainees acquire with the BEST program are useful in all careers within and beyond academia, and might satisfy their passion to use their research to have a broader impact.

Q: I'm concerned that BEST may take too much time and divert my trainees from their primary research goal...

A: In our last survey of 129 faculty members, 75% of PIs with a graduate student or postdoc participating in the BEST program responded that their trainees benefited from BEST.

Why is that? Because the skills trainees acquire are often directly beneficial to their research. A science communication course can help them do better presentations. Following a Lean Six Sigma certification can help them become more efficient.

We stress to all participants that their research work is their first priority.

Q: Is it really necessary? My trainees already have the skills to become a successful academic.

A: Surveys show that a majority of Cornell STEM PhDs will find a job outside academia.

Our mission is to enhance training opportunities for graduate students and postdoctoral scholars to prepare them for careers that could take them beyond conventional academic research.

Many of our participants also come full circle and decide academia is where they want to be. A successful career outcome is based on an informed choice.

Q: What happens when grad students and postdocs enroll in BEST?

A: Flexibility is key. We offer opportunities in four tracks that trainees can choose from: Industry, Entrepreneurship & Management; Science Policy; Science Communication; Governance, Risk & Compliance.

Over 350 trainees have taken part, and involvement varies for each participant. Some might attend one career panel discussion per semester; others might take part in hands-on opportunities and internships. We always encourage trainees to discuss their level of commitment with you.

Q: I like the idea! How can I help?

A: Whether you have experiences outside academia or you know other PhDs who have, we welcome your input! We would love to have you speak to groups of students interested in your career path, with all of its twists and turns. Please contact us to initiate this conversation.

We are happy to talk to you about any concerns you may have about your trainees participating in BEST.

Check out our website www.BEST.cornell.edu or follow us.