Overcoming Insufficient Academic Preparation: Perceived and Real

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Dilma Da Silva

Education
BS 1986 USP-Brazil / MS 1990 USP/ PhD 1997 Georgia Tech

Professional (Academia → Industry → Academia)
• Professor at USP-Brazil 1996 -2000 (tenure 2000)
• Research Scientist at IBM TJ Watson 2000-2012
  Manager since 2007; several other leadership titles
• Principal Engineer & Manager, Qualcomm Research
  (2012-14)
• Professor and Associate Head, Texas A&M University

Personal
• 1 cats, 125+ first cousins;
• caretaker 2010-2015
• Fun: knitting, reading, travel with people I love, babysitting for friends
Richard Ladner

• Education
  • B.S. St. Mary’s College of California, 1965
  • Ph.D. University of California, Berkeley, 1971

• Jobs
  • University of Washington, Seattle 1971 – present
  • Officially retired in 2017
  • NSF grants in broadening participation
    • AccessComputing
    • AccessCSforAll

• Area
  • Theoretical Computer Science (35 years)
  • Accessible Computing (15 years)

• Personal
  • Born in California to deaf parents
  • Twin brother who was schizophrenic
  • Married with two daughters both in their 30s
  • Enjoy golf, skiing, sailing
Imposter Syndrome
The imposter syndrome is a psychological term referring to a pattern of behavior where people doubt their accomplishments and have a persistent, often internalized fear of being exposed as a fraud.
What does the research say?

• 70% of people experience it at some point in their career.
• Affects women and people of color more, particularly if they are underrepresented in their profession.
• Affects graduate students quite often.
• Affects successful people.
What do you do about it?

• Recognizing it in yourself
• Expressing self-doubt in a safe environment where encouragement can be found
• Don’t be paralyzed by self-doubt
• Make slow and steady progress toward goals
Exercise

• Pair and share
• Introduce yourselves to each other
• Share at least one self-doubt related to your academic career
• Without judgement, encourage each other
I believe I am unprepared while taking a course 😞 What do I do?
Techniques to Catch Up in a Course

• Pair and Share
• How did you handle it in the past?
Speakers Experience

• Find guidance – instructor, TAs, classmates, advisors

• Prepare ahead of time
  • TA in the prerequisite
  • Audit the prerequisite
  • If course was captured, review the captured course
Speakers Experience

• Let go of perfectionism
• Let go of vanity and shame
• Let go perceptions of you as representing your tribe
My preparation level is underestimated by instructor or classmates 😞

What do I do?
My preparation level is underestimated

• How did you handle this in the past?
• Pair and share
Tactics we have seen

• Ignoring
• Point it out (in a thoughtful, non-judgmental way)
• Making a point of speaking up where there are opportunities to ”shine”
• Offer help to other people who may be struggling
• Visit office-hours showing complete work and asking for pointers to more advanced material
• Document it in course/TA evaluations
Witness

• What do you do if you see someone who is underestimated?
Perpetrator

• What if you underestimate someone else?
I believe I don’t have sufficient preparation for my research project 😞

What do I do?
Closing the Gap in Preparation for Research

• What has worked for you?
• Pair and Share
Our Experience

• Get help in assessing the gap
  • It is often smaller than you think
  • Find concrete suggestion of what to read or problems to practice

• Be aware that going after better preparation is a common procrastination technique
  • Research is hard. (Most valuable things in life are hard.) It is tempting to stay in the learning phase instead of venturing in the producing phase of the work
Our Experience

• For certain areas, you need knowledge on how to build the artifacts you need for your research
• Being active in reading groups
• Reserve a regular slot of time for learning
• Tactical practice
  • As you learn, practice necessary skills. Write summaries of papers and critical review of the literature or build pieces of software needed in other projects.
My preparation for this research project is being underestimated 😞

What do I do?
My research preparation is underestimated

• Did this happen to you?
• How did you handle it.
• Pair and Share.
Our Experience

• It can be painful: leverage your support group
  • Don’t have one?  
    It has been a game changer for many careers

• Don’t take it personally.  
  We all make judgements and many are incorrect
Our Experience

• Speak up and show initiative: getting the spotlight is not a bad thing
• Know your strengths and look for opportunities to make them known
• Be well prepared for meetings and presentations
• If you find “gold stars” and awards silly ...
  ... it may be helpful to think of them as part of being well-dressed for the occasion
Thank you!

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