Perspectives from Grad Cohort Alums

Christine Bassem
Shruthi Kubatur
Rubi Quiñones
Introductions
My graduate school experience
Find your community

• Define what community means to you
  • similar identity
  • similar experiences
  • similar values

• What did I do?
  • Looked for an opportunity to make a difference
  • Tried to find a group outside the department that has similar values to mine
Find your community

Through GWISE, I managed to find another purpose to my graduate experience

- Empowered other women in science and engineering (2012-2015)
- Created the first Mothers’ support group in the university (2014)
- Helped draft the first paternity leave policy for graduate students at the university (2015)
- Connected with other women graduate students in my own department

By helping them, I was helping myself heal.

Eventually, that purpose gave me the motivation to GRADUATE!
Definition of success

Make your own path!
My definition of success over time
Redefine success

- Your path is unique to only you

- Define what success means to you
  - What is important to you?
  - What makes you happy?
  - What keeps you energized?

- Learn from the journeys of others
  - But you don’t have to follow in their footsteps!
SMART GOALS

Specific  Measurable  Attainable  Relevant  Time-bound
What is Your Ikigai?

Ikigai (ee-key-guy) is a Japanese concept that combines the terms *iki*, meaning “alive” or “life,” and *gai*, meaning “benefit” or “worth.” When combined, these terms mean that which gives your life worth, meaning, or purpose.

Ikigai is similar to the French term “raison d’etre” or “reason for being.”
Read articles — they hand a lot of important problems to you on a silver platter

Read papers — this needs more work sometimes, but read papers like you are reviewing them for faults
  ▪ Some of these shortcomings can be genuinely fascinating
  ▪ Some of these can fit right into your dissertation topic

Play with technology, gadgets, algorithms
  ▪ Practical experience > just theoretical knowledge
  ▪ Try to break them — maybe you can fix them in your PhD
  ▪ Try to apply them — maybe you can use them for something the creators had not originally intended for
Life shouldn’t be a struggle — looking at undergrad classmate’s mega mansion shouldn’t hurt deep inside

Correlated with utility — ability to get a good-paying job means working in an area that is probably useful
  ▪ Not always true, but mostly is
  ▪ In capitalistic view, correlates with what the world needs

Ability to attract funding
  ▪ For faculty aspirants: you need to feed grad students, even if they can’t still buy organic milk
  ▪ For research aspirants: you still need funding
  ▪ For “start-up stargazers”: VCs are picky
Be objective — evaluate your skill level without bias
- A trick: imagine you’re interviewing a candidate with your exact skillset and knowledge

Work in progress — ability is developed
- Be reasonable with where you want to get (mastering Python may take a month; mastering signal processing may take years)
- But get to 80% fast

Makes research more enjoyable
- It’s easier to push the boundary if you’re to the boundary
- Helps immensely with identifying interesting problems to work on
- You’ll be more creative with your solutions
Don’t settle
- Sometimes PIs don’t have money for what you love
- Look for programs where there are multiple PIs working on similar topics (what exact topic they’ll have funding for is a bit stochastic and time-varying)
- Try to get your own funding (grants, TA)
- Maybe work with a PI who has money for something you actually love (see next point)

Really, what is it?
- Find out what you truly love about it
- If you think you love cryptography, you may really be in love with number theory. So maybe do math (?)

Correlated with ability
- Caution: love and infatuation are two different things (like with people) — three straight lecture of quantum loop gravity from MIT doesn’t mean it’s your love
- If you truly love a field, you’re typically good at it

Maintaining motivation and focus
- It’s important to remind yourself why you’re doing your PhD — that’s much easier if you love the topic / problem space
Do I know what I am looking for?

No: Talk to a broader set of people; attend broader sessions

Yes: Find specific people / sessions

Looking for research ideas?
Looking for funding?
Looking for collaborators?
Looking for internships / jobs?
Looking for specific help?
General grad school existential crisis?

Come talk to us! CRA-WP is the place!
Takeaways

1. **Support** is CRUCIAL!
2. You are the **main character** in your story. Embrace it.
3. You should **not** endure any toxic, abusive behavior from anyone!
THANK YOU!

Come talk to us! CRA-WP is the place!