Perspectives from Grad Cohort Alums

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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

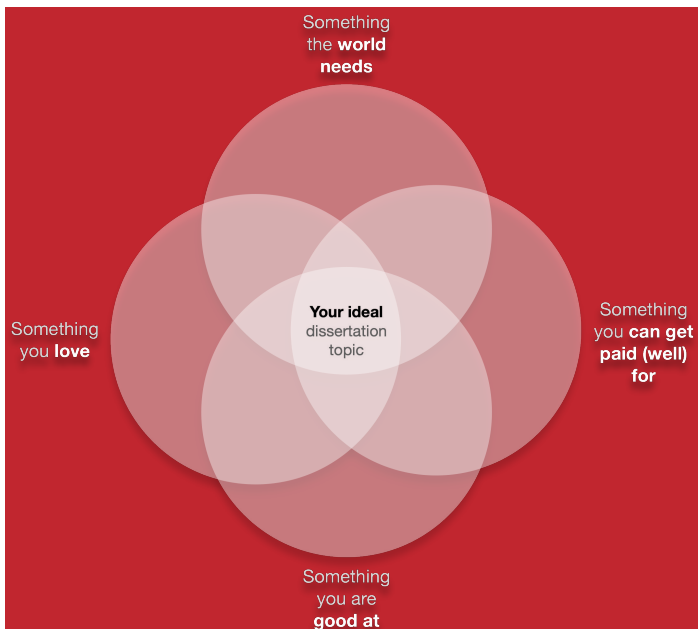| Specific	Measurable	Attainable	Relevant	Time-bound
S	**M**	**A**	**R**	**T**
G	O	A	L	S

What is *Your* Ikigai?

生き甲斐

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."

Something the **world** needs

Something you **love**

Your ideal dissertation topic

Something you **can get paid (well) for**

Something you are **good at**

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Something the world needs

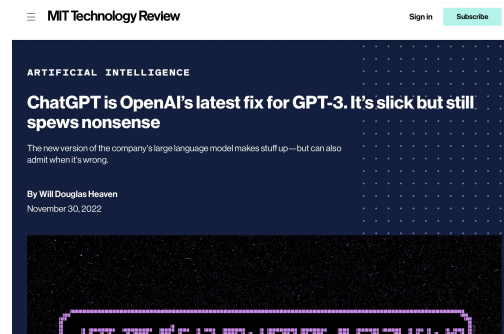This is where it's important to **read** and **play**

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

MIT Technology Review

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ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

ChatGPT is OpenAI's latest fix for GPT-3. It's slick but still spews nonsense

The new version of the company's large language model makes stuff up—but can also admit when it's wrong.

By Will Douglas Heaven
November 30, 2022

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Something you can get paid (well) for

Doesn't mean you'll end up selling your soul for stock options;

Or that you should quit physics to be a Wall Street trader.

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

✔

✔

✖

(Definitely not as the primary driver)

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Something you are good at

It may not be enough; but it's a good starting point

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

Something you love

This is where it's important not to compromise too much

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
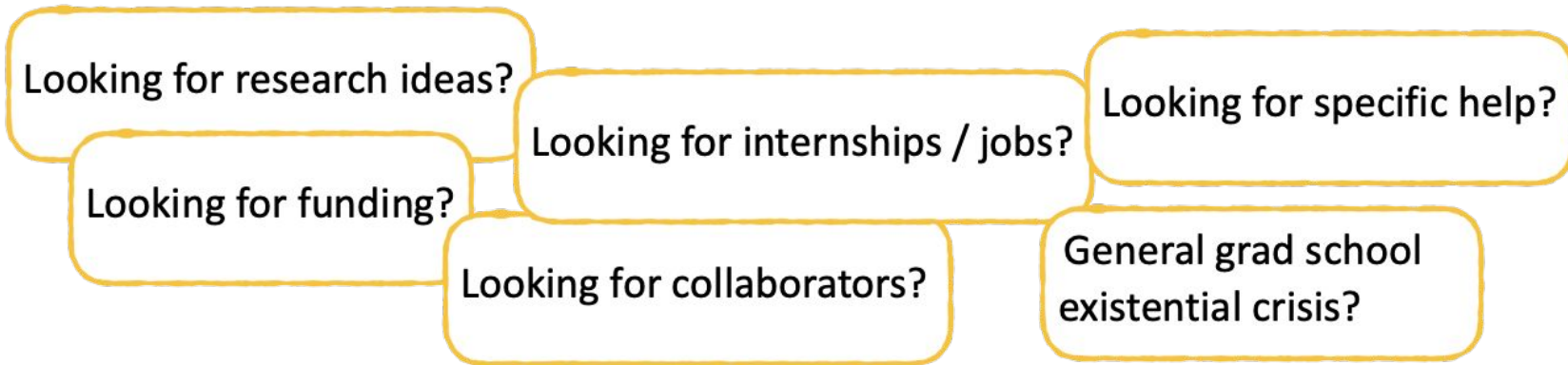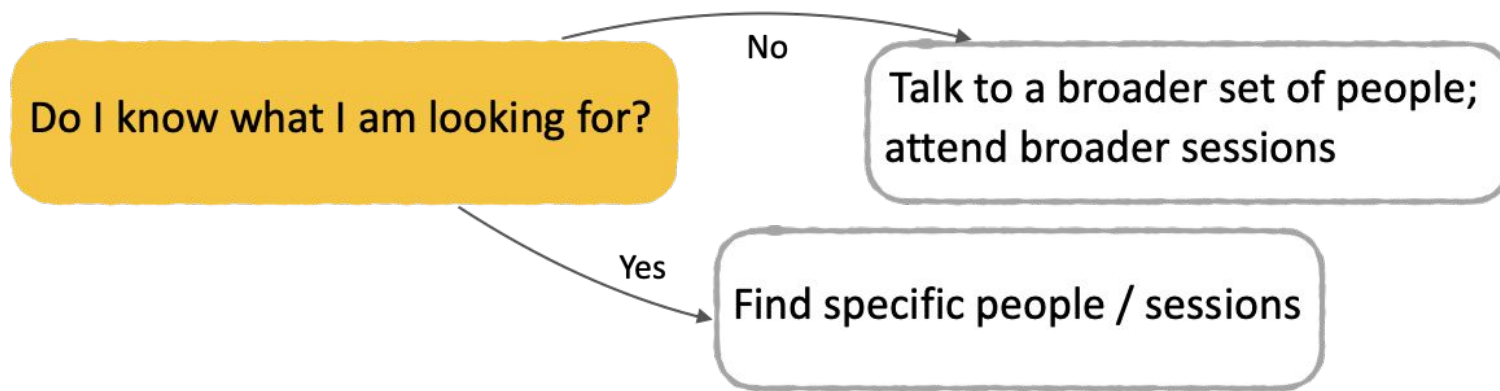- If you truly love a field, you're typically good at it

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

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!

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THANK YOU!

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