Reflecting on the First Few Years

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Reflecting on the First Few Years

It’s a firehose of opportunities. Knowing what to choose is hard

Think long term

Find great collaborators

Give yourself permission to fail. It’s ok to be “a bad person”
It’s a firehose of opportunities

• You will get asked to do a LOT of things. Especially if you’re a woman
  • This is a good thing
• If possible, try to find someone who can help you triage (e.g., a mentor)
• You HAVE TO say no to a lot of things (even if you would want to say yes)
  • It’s ok to be a “bad person”
  • “Thanks for the invitation, but I unfortunately have a conflict and can’t make it”
  • “Apologies, As junior faculty, I really need to focus on my research and won’t be able to do a good job. Unfortunately I must decline”
Research

• *What I regret: spending lots of time on too many projects that went nowhere*
  • Try to choose only a few things, even if all 1000 opportunities seem awesome
• **MAKE time for research.** e.g., block off mornings, block off a whole day, find ways to NOT be interrupted
  • Prioritize it above ALL the other things that WILL come up. ("I have a conflict")
• **Find and work with great collaborators**
  • Even if you think you need to “prove yourself” by working alone
  • Motivated by same problems
  • Complementary skillsets
  • Productive (i.e., they actually DO work)
  • Fun to work with
Funding / Grant writing

• Figuring out how to get funding is/was really stressful

• Think long term. Do things now that will get funded 2-3 years from now

• Find and work with great collaborators
  • Even if you think you need to “prove yourself” by doing it alone
  • Learn how they write grants
  • SO MANY tips and tricks that can improve your chances
  • Bigger, better ideas
(Ph.D.) Students

- Probably the biggest challenge I didn’t expect
  - I’ve made lots of mistakes, wish I’d done some things differently

- Student recruitment is *hard*
- Most of them won’t be productive for ~2 years
  - Think long term
  - Make time to do research yourself (especially writing)

- Invest in group culture, peer support, help them to help each other
  - Take time to discuss and reflect on the general research process
Teaching

• “We really need someone to teach X, Y, Z”
• Try to get/negotiate for courses you WANT to teach
• Try to make sure you teach the SAME courses a few times
• Invest in creating structure, it saves time later. Think long term
• But some things don’t scale
How do you deal with feeling overwhelmed?

• Failure is a part of the job, it WILL happen (often). It still hurts.
  • Rejected grant proposals
  • Teaching failures
  • Student mentoring failures
  • Collaboration/project failures
  • Saying “yes” when you should say “no”

• Peer support (no one knows better than other junior faculty)
• Self care (e.g., exercise OR sit in silence and stare at the wall)
• It’s ok to think about quitting. It can help to make it explicit
• Think long term
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