Industrial Research Funding

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CRA Career Mentoring Workshop 2022

My role at Microsoft

A. Advance the future with our products
B. Build a research culture within our products
C. Connect our products with research

Research increasingly important to industry

- The move to the cloud has changed how products are built
- Created feedback loops
  - Experimentation: Compare different experiences
  - Artificial intelligence: Feed data back into the system

Scale increasingly important to research

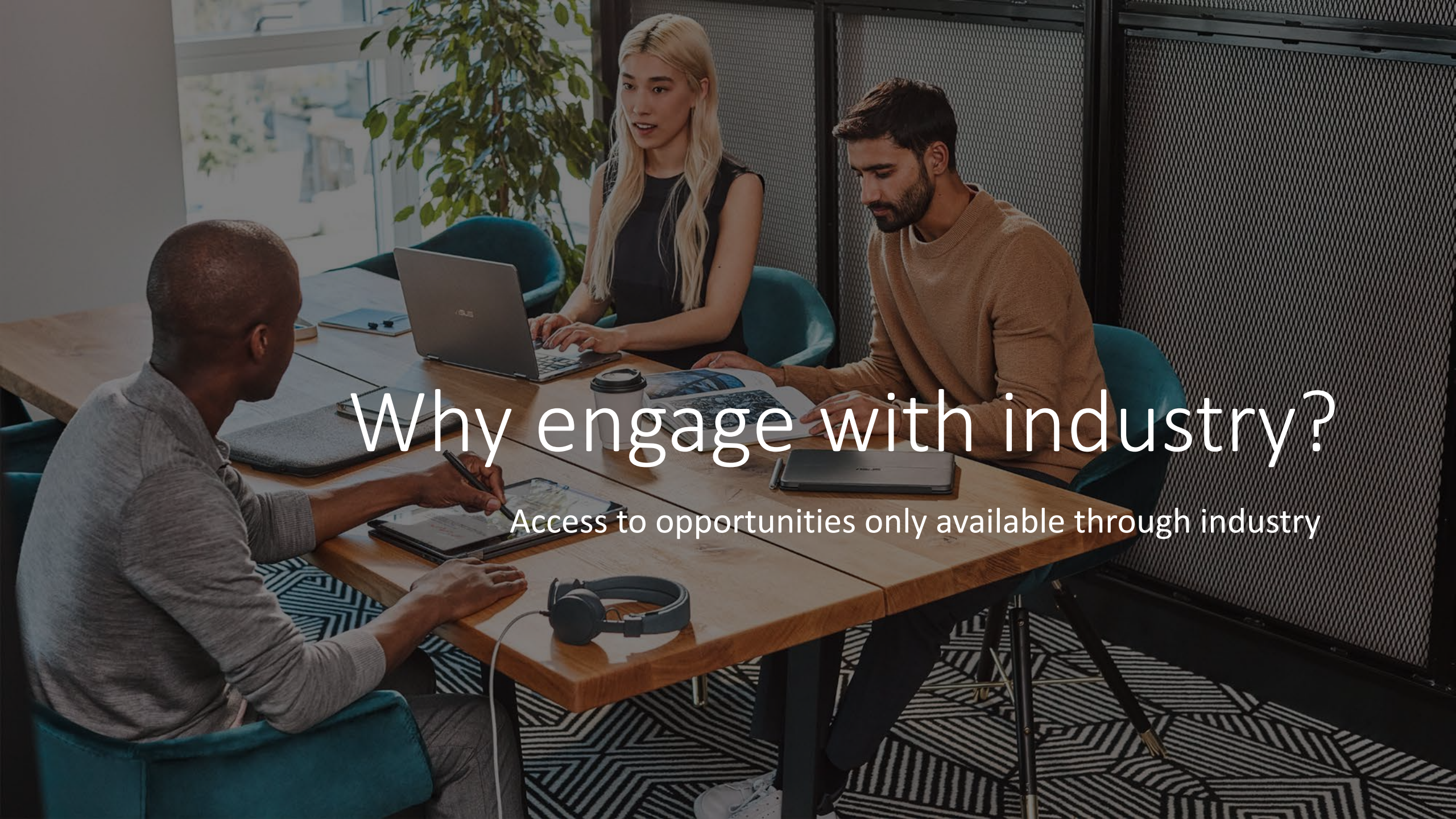
Why engage with industry?

Obvious answer: $$ Money $$

- Examples at Microsoft:
  - Microsoft Turing Academic Program
  - Faculty Fellowships
- Often multi-year and unrestricted
- Worth more with no overhead
- Can leverage into more funding
- Proposals tend to be shorter
  - Format: CFP-based or project based

But focusing on money misses the big picture

- The grants tends to be small
- Unpredictable, priorities change
- Can carry hidden costs:
  - Restrictions on IP
  - Restrictions on open source
  - Mismatch of expectations
- But mostly: Focusing on money misses many opportunities!



Why engage with industry?

Access to opportunities only available through industry

Beyond money…

Scale

- Access to data
- Access to customers
- Access to compute

Collaboration

- Shared projects
- Events
- Visiting researcher

Students

- Internships
- Jobs post-graduation
- Funding

How to engage with industry?

Understand why industry engages

- Talent
- Thought leadership
- Exploration
- Risk mitigation
- Rich ecosystem

Know your “value proposition”

Get to know the people at the company	Build a rich network Understand people’s roles
Figure out what you bring to the table	Understand the company’s position in the market Know the opportunity and the threat Explain it in terms they understand
Help the company get value from your research	Ensures your work has impact Creates a desire for more for them

Questions?

Questions Submitted in Advance

- Selecting funding sources (industry, NSF, DARPA, DoD):
  - Where do I have the best odds of funding? What are the success rates?
  - How does the research community compare the sources?
- Securing industry funding:
  - What is the process?
  - What is the selection criteria?
  - How to build relationships with folks in industry?
- Making the collaboration work:
  - How to manage funds and effort throughout the length of a funded project?
  - How to move from, “We give you $X to build Y,” to research-oriented work?
  - How to deal with IP and publication restrictions?