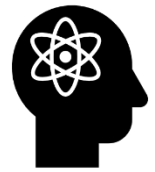




Becoming a Scientist—How to Know What You Need to Know



Virtual CAIRIBU ARCTICS Community Forum, August 4, 2021

The goal of this CAIRIBU ARCTICS Community forum was to have successful scientists in various career pathways and stages reflect on their trainee years and share the lessons they wish they learned earlier. Panelists included **Tudor Borza, MD, MS**; **Marvin Langston, PhD, MPH**; **Casey Steadman, PhD**; **Emily Davidson, MD**, and **Chad Vezina, PhD**. Each brought a unique career stage, path, and perspective to the main theme of the session. This summary aims to consolidate and disseminate these perspectives and themes.



Develop Prioritization Skills

- Take stock of all the balls “in the air” (teaching, mentoring, research, family, etc.) and determine which are glass and cannot be dropped and which are plastic and will bounce (Dr. Steadman)
- Include your personal life in the balance to avoid burnout (Dr. Borza)
- Use your time efficiently by making your work work for you (e.g. “reusing” your work to create presentations for grand rounds lectures or educational talks, or by submitting your work from different perspectives to multiple conferences) (Dr. Davidson)

Identify What You Need

Another theme was identifying what you need in order to achieve your specific goals. Questions to ask include:

- What support do you need from the institution?
- What qualities in a mentor do you work best with?
- What type of environment makes you happiest at work?

Dr. Langston brought up an interesting premise here: content versus method training. Recognizing the difference between these cornerstones, seeing how they connect and build upon each other between career stages, and leveraging your focus at each step can help you make forward progress in your career.

Build Your Brand

Dr. Vezina’s advice focused on developing a brand for both you and your science. “Playing the game” is an important part of academia, and those who learn it and play it well are often those who are funded. In order to be successful, those making the award decisions need to be aware of you as a researcher, your expertise in a field or technique, and your lab as a whole. When breaking into a new field, start small and local, presenting your work across campus as much as possible, and keep the focus consistent and on “brand”. By developing a good reputation and strong networking at your home base, eventually that reputation will spread. Furthermore, putting effort into researching who is at the top of the field will pay dividends; identify members of study sections, find organizations with members in common, learn from question-and-answer sessions at talks. Strategizing to network in these groups will help you both hone your brand and share it widely. Dr. Davidson

added that keeping your CV and social media updated could create networking and job opportunities that further career progression.

Find a Mentor

Finally, each panelist mentioned the importance of a good mentor in some way. Trainees can, and should, take initiative whenever possible to develop good technical and soft skills as their career progresses. That being said, science is often times a word-of-mouth discipline that requires support and direction within any given field. A good, supportive, and attentive mentor can make a huge difference at every stage of your career. Paying attention to someone who is where you want to be a few years down the line can help you prepare early. Ask yourself, how do they spend their time? With what do they seem to struggle? What can I do now to better prepare myself for their position? Then plan actionable, concrete steps you can take to achieve those goals, whether it be joining a committee, asking how to write budgets, doing mock interview negotiations, or sitting in on a study section.

While this meeting provided a number of crucial pieces of advice for trainees, the central message is evident. **Identify your strengths, weaknesses, and resources and make a concrete, actionable plan to leverage these areas to advance your career—with some help along the way.**

Summary prepared by Alexis Adrian, CAIRIBU Trainee, ARCTICS Planning Committee Member
