Welcome to the Meet-the-Expert Webinar: How to Survive in Academia

Friday, March 8, 2019
2-3 p.m. ET
Welcome to the Meet-the-Experts Webinar Series: How to Survive in Academia

Raise your hand if...
2:00-2:05 p.m. ET  Welcome and Introductions
2:05-2:25 p.m. ET  How to Survive in Academia
2:25-2:55 p.m. ET  Question and Answer Session
2:55-3:00 p.m. ET  Closing Remarks
To submit a question:
Type your question in the Questions box of your webinar panel.
Question 1: What is your current career status?

A. Graduate Student
B. Academic Post-Doc
C. Industry Post-Doc
D. Industry Scientist
E. Junior Faculty
Question 2: What are your career plans as of now?

A. Pharma
B. Biotech
C. Government
D. Academia
How to Survive in Academia
Academic Medicine

Charles G. Drake MD / PhD
Director GU Medical Oncology
Co-Director: Immunotherapy Program
Associate Director for Clinical Research
Professor of Oncology
Herbert Irving Cancer Center at Columbia University
Biography

1963 Born in Rahway NJ
1976 First job: Lifeguard / Pool Manager
1985 BS Electrical / Biomedical Engineering, Rutgers University
1989 – Masters Science Biomedical Engineering*
1989 – 1997 MD / PhD U Colorado / National Jewish Seminar by John Kappler on T Cell Recognition
1997 – 2002 Residency / Fellowship Johns Hopkins
2002 – 2016 Faculty at JHU
2016 – To Columbia University (Lead GU Medical Oncology)
In Two Words

- Papers
- Grants
Papers

• The Perfect is the Enemy of the Good

• Pubmed = the leveler

• Staleness
Grants

• Get on a Study Section

• The Unbearable Capriciousness of Reviewers

• Recycling is Good for the Planet

• Timing

• CALL your program officer
Management

• It’s a SCIENCE

• Training
  – Courses
  – Reading
Service / Teaching

• Undervalued by Promotions Committees

• Machiavelli
Personnel

- Everyone is NOT like you
- Get the right people on the bus / the wrong people off the bus
Reading

• The Alchemist
  – Paulo Coelho

• The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People
  – Stephen R. Covey

• Good to Great
  – Jim Collins

• Emotional Intelligence
  – Daniel Goleman

• How to Win Friends and Influence People
  – Dale Carnegie
How to ‘survive’ in academia
SITC Webinar
03/08/2019

Greg M. Delgoffe, Ph.D.
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DISCLOSURE

Greg M. Delgoffe, Ph.D

The following relationships exist related to this presentation:

Consultant: Pieris Pharmaceuticals, Western Oncolytics
Research Support: Pfizer, Bluebird Bio, TCR² Therapeutics
Founder and Scientific Advisor: TTMS, Inc.
DISCLOSURE

Greg M. Delgoffe, Ph.D

While honored to ask to give this presentation,
I must admit, I haven’t really ‘survived’ yet.

While ‘surviving’, funding is still tight, tenure is still in process, and it’s still tough dealing with the academic machine.

But I will try during this time to share what I know.
There will also be an insanely hilarious amount of stock photography in this presentation.
My story

• Bachelor’s Degree: Western Michigan University
• Ph.D at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine (Immunology Training Program)
  • Trained under Jonathan Powell
  • Studied the role of mTOR signaling in T cell differentiation
• Postdoc at St. Jude (Immunology Department)
  • Trained with Dario Vignali
  • Studied regulatory T cell biology in cancer and homeostasis
• Started my own group at University of Pittsburgh in 2014
  • Explore the role of metabolism in regulation of antitumor T cell immunity
Objectives

- Planning your faculty trajectory
- Interviewing and getting your faculty job
- Starting your lab
- Growing your lab
Your faculty search starts right when you begin your postdoc (maybe before)

• If your sights are truly set on an academic career, then make sure you choose a postdoc lab that can give you a platform for success

• This is not just the mentor or the project or the institution: it’s the whole landscape of everything together

• Does your postdoc lab have the pieces in place to make an impactful contribution and bolster your career?
Not Grad School 2.0: Staying goal-oriented as a postdoc

• Your postdoc time is limited: the longer you take (past a certain point at least), the harder it will be to be competitive for a faculty job
• Thus, it’s important to maintain high productivity and publish as well as you can
• Go to meetings (but not too many), give talks, but most importantly, generate as much data as possible
Understand what it takes

• To compete for a faculty job in this field, there are a few things you must possess
  • You need at least one very good keystone paper: high impact (CNS) or mid-high (Nature Immunology, Immunity, etc.)
  • In reality, you need multiple papers around a scientific idea
  • Excellent (top 1%-type) recommendations from well known individuals
  • Evidence of national recognition
  • A good, original idea that you know how to do that isn’t just a rehash of your postdoc
  • A well written one-pager that describes your future research program
  • A scientific identity
Build (and USE) all your networks

• Take advantage during grad school and postdoc to meet faculty, especially in places you are interested in for your lab
• It’s tough to cold call, so ask your bosses’ help in this
• Be social at meetings: this is where real science gets done
• Reach out to your collaborators: they’re a great resource
• When the time comes: don’t be afraid to cash in on your hard work
When are you ready?

• Simply put: **when you can get a job**
  • Papers
  • An identity
  • Strong recommendations
  • Maybe some funding
  • A thick skin (more on that later)
Every department is different

- The one thing I can tell you about all of my interviews is that **every one was different**
- Each search committee has an identity (even within institutions), and there are essentially no rules for how it goes
- Don’t take it personally: if they want a microbiome person and you study T cell differentiation, you may get the interview (because you have a good CV), but you won’t get the job
- Do not send out a generic research plan and letter: tailor each package specifically to the institution and **do your homework!**
Every department is different

• Some departments like two visits (one formal talk, one chalk talk), many squeeze them in to one
• Some chalk talks are literal (no slides), others want a full presentation
• Some will want a teaching statement; for others providing one might actually be a red flag
• If you get invited to an interview, **ASK YOUR HANDLER (admin, search committee member) what they expect**
• Practice your chalk talk: alone, with colleagues, with your boss/network
Your faculty visits:

• Some candidates really go crazy on the visits, 10, 20 institutions: you can only have one job, so only visit places you actually see yourself being

• Give a strong, engaging research talk - it’s ok to ease up on the details a little bit (where appropriate) to deliver your message and research vision

• Put a slide or two about your envisioned research program (many people in the room will not go to your chalk talk)

• You need to be on at all times: rest assured you are being evaluated from the moment you arrive – a single bad interview with a search committee member could tank your whole application

• Take nothing for granted – search committees are fickle
The chalk talk

• While the rules are different everywhere, this is usually a faculty-only closed session where you discuss your research program
• Sometimes, people want this broken down as if it were an R01 (by aim) – but again, every place is different
• Strike a balance between big ideas (why it’s important) and fine detail (why only YOU can do it)
• Make sure you highlight how you can interact/collaborate with the department
• **PRO TIP:** Bring your own dry-erase markers
You had a great visit—now what?! 

- Usually after some number of visits (usually with the dean, chair, administrators, etc.), you will get a verbal confirmation of interest.

- As junior faculty, negotiation is important but most start-up packages are pretty similar, but this is the time to also evaluate what you need.

- **Do your homework:** I had a spreadsheet for almost every expense I planned to have for three years—this justified any requests for more money.
  - Meet with core directors, facility managers, business office admins, etc.
You had a great visit – now what?! 

• Weigh all the options and ask questions:
  • What do techs cost?
  • What’s the mouse per diem?
  • How do people pay for flow?
  • Who pays for student tuition? How many T32s does the institution have?
  • Does your space have hoods, etc. already in place? Is there any large equipment available/in storage?

• All of these things change the ‘value’ of the offer – the same amount of money in two different places means two very different things for your program

• At the end of the day, you can only have one job, so go with your gut: what makes you feel like you will be valued/at home?
Holy !%@# they gave you a job

• When should you leave?
  • Unless you’re sitting on a REALLY big paper, **move on**
  • Your CV ‘starts over’ as a PI, more first author papers are not likely to net you tenure, grants, etc (and it may serve as a distraction)

• Make sure everything is in place regarding any special reagents, mice, techniques that you may bring with you – it’s harder to manage all this once they leave
Being realistic about your first year

• Transitioning to the PI role is tough – you are going to go from mono-focused, extremely busy to being rather diffuse and having a lot of free time (really!)

• Try to take advantage of this time because it won’t last long
  • IACUC, IRB, biosafety, EH&S – get these approvals before starting experiments

• Do not rush into filling your lab space: taking your time and building a good team will continue to pay out as you get busier

• Go to meetings, become an ‘intellectual collaborator’, plan your big purchases
Your first hire

- For the first couple of years, **you** are your best worker.
- So your first hire should be someone able to do the ‘little’ things that would bog you down and keep you out of the lab: ordering, meeting with vendors, managing budgets – in other words, a lab tech.
- This person can additionally be another pair of hands for you: train them well and THEY can help train your future hires.
- Get a sense of commitment from them (non-binding) when you interview: a really good person may not be that helpful to you if they plan to leave in 9 months.
- **PROTIP:** Ask your department; they may have done some work for you! See if anyone recently hired a technician, and then ask them who their SECOND choice was, and why.
Be focused, but not too focused

• The freedom of running your own program is really exciting, but it’s important not to start NINE projects when you begin your lab.

• That being said, you want to follow the data – if you see something interesting in a cell type or model you hadn’t planned to work on, it may be worth it to invest some time in it.

• This is my personal bias, but I believe your start-up package is meant to be spent: don’t pinch pennies worried that it will run out. Instead, do the experiment that will tell you the answer and get you a big paper or excellent preliminary data.
Develop a funding strategy

Your colleagues in year 1:

STOP TRYING TO MAKE AN R01 HAPPEN

IT'S NOT GONNA HAPPEN

• Too many junior faculty try to write an R01 right away
  • This is so much wasted time and effort
  • In this funding climate, with no last-author papers on your CV, the chances of funding are slim (not impossible, but highly unlikely)

• Further, your writing skills are limited, what you really need is practice

• Read your mentors/colleagues’ funded grants, and get them to read your drafts (early, not one week before the deadline)
Develop a funding strategy

- Start with local foundations, pilot grants
- Foundations with young investigator-type grants
- Cancer society grants
- Sponsored research
- REAL R21 (not mini R01) applications
Publish, publish, publish

• At the end of the day, we are here to publish papers – and papers get you grants (it’s not the other way around)

• When you are in your first couple years, you have a lot of resources and a lot of time (and extra hands) – the sweat equity of generating data during this time will pay off

• You may also want to modify your expectations of journal impact – while you want to get a high impact paper, you also don’t want to be in review for 2 years (because you need that CV!)
For the first couple years, say YES

• You will be asked to do a LOT of things as a junior faculty member
• As much as it pains you, it’s important to say YES, at least for a while
• I was asked to give a talk last minute; it was incredibly inconvenient, but this talk paved the way for a new collaboration, papers, grants, and a clinical trial – all because I said YES
Questions?
To submit a question:
Type your question in the Questions box of your webinar panel.

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Meet-the-Expert Webinar Series

SAVE THE DATE!

How to Kick Start Your Career in the US

Tuesday, April 16, 2019

Noon-1:00 p.m. CST

Faculty Experts:

Sruthi Ravindranathan, PhD - Emory University
Krishnendu Roy, PhD - Georgia Institute of Technology

To register, please visit: www.sitcancer.org/education/mte-webinars