

ASA Early Career Researcher Mentoring Workshop – Session summary

Session Topic: Planning your career – The Big Picture Discussion Leader: Warrick Couch

Note takers: James Allison, Sean Farrell & Russell Jurek

If you only remember three things from this talk, remember these...

1. You need to plan where you want to be in 5-10 years, then set goals and work out how to achieve them.
2. Get a mentor.
3. Ensure that the community is aware of your area of expertise.

Session summary/notes

- Astrophysics grads have ~0% unemployment.
- Training in Astro opens you up to a broad range of career choices.
- Big Picture = think 'Career'.
- 'Career' includes life roles, leisure, activities, learning, and work.
- "Careers are a journey, not a destination!"
- Career is a lifelong approach.
- Career drivers: Material rewards, power & influence, search for meaning, expertise, creativity, affiliation, autonomy, job security (A job that provides a solid and predictable future.), and status.
- Managing your career successfully requires: self-awareness, opportunity awareness, decision making, implementation.
- You need a plan of where you want to be in 5-10 years time. This includes mid-course options 'B', in between 'A' (origin) and 'C' (destination).
- Need to set strategies now for getting to your destination.
- Destination options:
 - University sector (research-only, research/teaching, teaching-only). Pros: freedom/autonomy, student/learning culture. Cons: research time reduced by teaching.
 - Observatory, government research org (research-only, research/observatory duties, support role). Pros: invaluable experience with telescope/instrumentation. Cons: research time reduced by observatory duties, not all jobs ongoing.
 - Career outside astronomy.
- 7 career strategies:
 1. "Do all you can to become well known for the research you do and your specific area of expertise." "You've got to establish yourself as an expert in a particular field". Ultimate goal – become an internationally recognized expert.
 - a. Keep your research focused, maximizing output in one or two areas.
 - b. Work in areas that are globally relevant.
 - c. Use every opportunity to tell people about your research.
 2. Publish, publish, publish!!! Whether you like it or not your publication track record carries enormous weight in assessing how good you are.
 - a. Quality/impact is as important as quantity.
 - b. Typical output of ARC Future Fellow (5-15 yrs out):
 - i. 5.6 papers per year (+/- 2)

- ii. 35% as first author
 - iii. m-index (h/#years) =1.8
 - c. Being part of large collaborations that publish is a good way to improve your publication track record.
- 3. Grow your links/connections. Networking and collaborations extremely important for research, learning, and creating new opportunities. Collaboration breeds new ideas and generates job opportunities.
 - a. Increasing value placed on international linkages and collaborations by govt. and funding agencies.
 - b. Working in teams provides an effective way of maintaining research through job interruptions.
 - c. AVOID becoming 2nd string 'bit player' in collaborations (need to lead research, best shown through being 1st author).
- 4. Get some teaching experience. Don't underestimate value of teaching experience.
 - a. Some teaching experience is considered good, no matter how small.
 - b. Research supervision of students counts!
 - c. Teaching enhances your communication skills.
- 5. Get yourself a mentor (or 2). Mentor = someone who sees more talent and ability within you than you see yourself, and helps bring it out (not just someone with more experience than you).
 - a. A mentor can be someone who sees the strength in you – that is important.
 - b. Seek a mentor IN ADDITION to your boss!
 - c. Your institution should be willing to help you find a mentor/establish mentor schemes. Be proactive!
- 6. Set yourself goals and targets. Performance best motivated and measured by setting goals/targets and regularly evaluating your progress.
 - a. Many people don't set themselves goals.
 - b. Strongly recommend that this is done on an annual basis with reference to a plan with goals & targets.
 - c. Set yourself some stretch goals, be prepared you may not achieve everything. "What are the key things you will be evaluated on for your next job/grant?"
 - d. Your goals should align with your career plan. They should be goals that will take you from 'A' to 'B', so that you can eventually get to 'C'.
 - e. Most importantly, YOU set them, so YOU have to meet them.
- 7. Be professional about job seeking. The importance of a well organised & professional looking CV and learning good interview skills are often overlooked.
 - a. CV should be clear & well organized statement of experience & skills relevant to the job (should be on 1st page).
 - b. Your CV should highlight why you're uniquely qualified for the position.
 - c. Your mentors, senior colleagues and Personal Development courses can all help with developing job interview skills.
 - d. Your CV should communicate who you collaborate with. Discuss the collaborations you're part of, and highlight those that you have initiated.
- How employable are you? Communication, teamwork, problem-solving, self-management, planning and organizing, technology, life-long learning, initiative & enterprise, personal attributes.
- Mid-course options:
 - Working overseas. There has been a strong expectation in Australia that PhD

students should go overseas for at least their 1st postdoc to be competitive for a permanent job.

- Much less pressure to do this now.
- Valuable thing to do if you have the opportunity.
- Obtaining a fellowship. Having a fellowship for 3-5 yrs allows you to devote 100% of your time to research. Prestigious fellowships look good on your CV.

Interesting quotes from the discussion

- “Careers are a journey, not a destination!” (Warrick)
- “Do all you can to become well known for the research you do and your specific area of expertise.” “You’ve got to establish yourself as an expert in a particular field.” (Warrick)
- “The best work with the best.” “If you work with an A, you’re an A too. Work with As, Cs only work with Cs, because they see As and Bs as threatening.” (Boyle)
- “A mentor can be someone who sees more talent and ability within you than you do.” (Warrick)