Navigating the Current Job Market—Grab Hold of Your Future Now!^{1,2}

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ABSTRACT

Although the U.S. federal government, the National Science Foundation, and other influential groups have called for American universities to educate and train more scientists, a recent article in the *Washington Post* and broadcasting on National Public Radio affirmed a harsh reality: there are too few jobs for today's young scientists. Essentially, landing a job in science doesn't just happen, you must prepare! The intent of this education track session, targeted to students, postdoctorates, junior faculty, and other early- to midcareer professionals was to provide insights on trends in the current job market and offer strategies and resources to be competitive. The session featured speakers representing different work environments, such as academia, industry, health care institutions, public relations, and entrepreneurial positions. *Adv. Nutr.* 4: 667–669, 2013.

Introduction

You had a desire, a desire to be a scientist, so you went the extra mile and attended graduate or medical school with the idea that better job prospects would be on the horizon and the doors for the dream career would fly open for you upon graduating. After years of hard work, the degree in hand and the letters PhD or MD behind your name, the job applications have been sent out, but the outlook is dismal and the hiring environment is cold and the doors are shut. Why? How can this even be the reality? According to the National Science Foundation, this is not only a harsh reality but a compelling truth for future scientists in technical fields such as math, engineering, and science. As of 2011, approximately one-third of individuals with doctorates in these fields had full-time jobs or postdoctorate positions upon graduating—a rather bleak statistic. Now with this said, there is hope; the risk of chronic unemployment is low among individuals with doctorates or medical degrees, yet having the insight to properly navigate and stand out through the competitive job market is critical and minimizes job insecurities and angst. Universally, scientists need to have that edge that

enables them to be noticed to successfully secure the desired job. The intent of this education track session, targeted to students, postdoctorates, junior faculty, and other early- to mid-career professionals, was to provide insights on trends in the current job market and offer strategies and resources to be competitive. The session featured speakers representing different work environments, such as academia, industry, health care institutions, public relations, and entrepreneurial positions, to gain a global perspective regarding opportunities.

Show 'Em What You Got: Get Noticed in Today's Job Market

Led by a professional recruiter, Roger Lee provided actionable guidance to prepare young professionals for success in each represented sector of today's competitive job market. The foundation of getting noticed in today's job market included 4 fundamental components: 1) using social media to your advantage, 2) constructing a cover letter and resume with valuable content, 3) realizing the importance of the preinterview process, and 4) interviewing with purpose, having done your homework.

Connecting to social platforms, such as LinkedIn, which can be tailored to your needs through company searches, e-mail, blog links, Twitter, and Facebook, all can be effective networking tools that assist in establishing contact with individuals you know and those you would like to know. The overarching message is that, if you are not using social media for your search, you need to start now and tailor it to your potential position.

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Writing a cover letter and creating your resume can shape your career and make a lasting impression. Although the content may vary depending on the position, some points to keep in mind are as follows: keep both concise with relevant information tailored to that position, check for grammatical errors, let someone proofread both, project the appropriate professional tone, clearly point to positive attributes, and be truthful. Remember, application tracking systems search for keyword matches, so to have your resume flagged as a potential candidate the relevant terms must be included.

Although you may have gotten over the initial hurdle and landed the job interview, it is critical to do your research and personally assess yourself. Preparation is key; be sure to research the organization and the individuals with whom you are interviewing. Additionally, focus on yourself: personally assess your strengths and weaknesses, goals and expectations, career interests, previous performance, work experience, and professional appearance and mannerisms. In summary, Lee specified several key points to not only think about but to also be able to talk about: be prepared to ask and be asked questions, know your attributes and be prepared to emphasize them, be secure about your goals and expectations, and overall, prove you are the best candidate to fit the company's needs.

Stand Out in Corporate America

But how? Michael Kelley detailed some key elements to embarking on a career in industry and successfully staying there. Being in an industry position has a number of perks; because your skills, knowledge, and experience are worth something, you can affect the health and well-being of numerous people at once, there is plenty of opportunity to build an established career, and it can pay well and provide enjoyment. However, there are a few things you should know: 1) be prepared to move—corporate America is transit, so having an adventurous attitude is key; 2) corporate America can be a popularity contest, so develop thick skin and learn how you want to be part of the game; 3) plan and save—individuals over the age of 60 are far and few between; 4) you will make mistakes and be punished for doing good at times—get over it; 5) know effective, simple communication that management and the consumer get; and 6) often it's not important unless someone else thinks so, and therefore project flexibility is limited. Ultimately, it's all about the needs and success of the company. Although corporate America has a unique identity, any job requires the understanding that life is not fair and you must persevere; it is not the hours you put in, but the results that you produce. Think before you speak. Kelley emphasized that, once a corporate job is secure, it is important to continue developing yourself professionally to ultimately "be ready for when opportunity knocks."

Scholarly Advice from the Ivory Tower

You have grown up in academics, but as Jon Story iterated, "Have you experienced all of it?" Life as an academic, although challenging, lends itself to a unique, more

independent lifestyle than many other professions; you are often more in charge of your creative efforts and controlling the direction by which they go. However, like other professions, choosing an academic career path also deserves careful consideration and self-assessment. Points for reflection Story suggested were as follows: understand that life as an academic is often demanding of your time and requires research, teaching, administrative, and community commitments; you will be working with individuals 18–24 y of age most days of the week(end); you have creative freedom over the direction of your research and faculty status historically has resulted in a dependable job; you may need postdoctoral experience before committing to the responsibility of a faculty position. In preparation for a faculty position, have and learn your research story. Gaining a variety of experiences through research, teaching, administrative, and community efforts is valuable. Broadening your research experience can pay off by learning new techniques and models for present and future endeavors. Seeking out an interdisciplinary experience will enable you to function as a team member in science, which is often more efficient and effective overall. Once you have established your desire to pursue an academic career, it is important to understand varying aspects of different types of universities, whether they are research or teaching intensive or both, hard- or soft-money driven, their location, whether they offer a collaborative environment or not, the details of the tenure process, startup package negotiations, and jobs or benefits for significant others. Although these considerations may seem overwhelming initially, seek advice and discuss your intent and questions with colleagues and with experienced and young faculty to learn about their experiences and understand negotiation strategies and how to effectively carry them out. Educate yourself to better your destiny as an academic.

The Hunger Games: Navigating Research-Intensive Medical Institutions

You have decided to pursue a career in academics or you are already there. Yet, what is the ideal environment for you in which to conduct research? Academic environments can have diverse landscapes, particularly when comparing research-intensive medical institutes versus land-grant universities. Elizabeth Parks provided thorough insight regarding these environments and considerations when determining your ideal setting to conduct research. The first consideration: What is the diversity of culture, and research philosophies and expectations? A research-intensive medical institute has a varying culture that include practicing physicians and doctorate-level researchers, whereas a land-grant university is generally only attractive to molecular and clinician doctorate-level researchers. Learn about and appreciate the 2 different cultures and the philosophies and expectations at each. The second consideration: How do you want to contribute? Although both types of institutes enable research contributions, the approaches can be quite different. Research-intensive medical institutes are often entirely grant driven, and you are expected to contribute a significant

percentage of your salary; your promotion depends on it. Whereas at land-grant universities, research is critical, yet a significant percentage of your time effort is in teaching and service. Promotion is not entirely contingent on external funding through grants. The third consideration: Internal versus external power. At a land-grant institute, there can be many opportunities for internal funding at the departmental, program, college, or university level, whereas this is not the case in a research-intensive medical institute. At either type of institute, the expectation is still to obtain external funding sources, and this will require submitting many applications. As Parks stated, “in any environment, researchers must validate their existence with data.” Therefore, understanding the environment by which you as a researcher can conquer this feat most effectively and happily is critical to professional growth.

Think Big, Think Smart, Think Outside of the Box

As a student, postdoctorate, junior faculty, and other early-to midcareer professional, thinking outside the realm of traditional job paths should not be overlooked but rather embraced and explored. Cathy Kapica and Katya Tsaioun took risks and embarked on several entrepreneurial paths to eventually successfully running their own companies. As both vocalized, taking risks is challenging and takes you out of your comfort zone; however, such efforts can greatly pay off through professional freedom and perseverance. It is important to be open to continually expanding your skills sets, maintaining current scientific and

technological knowledge, and teaming with partners that complement your expertise. Planning your life years in advance can often hinder you from seeing immediate opportunities. As Kapica pointed out, “feed the creative side of your brain and expand your horizons beyond your field.” Whether you are taking a nontraditional or traditional career path, creativity and negotiating the walls of limitation are critical for happiness and success.

The current job market outlook and ways to improve your chances of landing a job are pressing topics. Sessions such as this provide awareness and the foundation for professionals to grab hold of their futures and be successful in today’s competitive job market. In summary, remember to

- Be real.
- Be informed.
- Develop a network of colleagues.
- Plan.
- Be persistent.
- Be flexible.
- Think ahead.
- Be open to change.
- Enjoy what you do and be happy doing it.
- Seek work and life balance.

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