Preparing for Academia: How to have a Successful Career

Gem Stapleton

University of Brighton, UK

Diagrams 2016: Graduate Symposium
So, you want an academic career...

- How do you maximize your chance of success?
- Look at: important factors in success.
- Tips: proactively give yourself the best chance.
So, you want an academic career...

PhD achievements

- Mastered your research topic.
- Thesis: significant contribution to knowledge.
- Maybe published a few papers.
- Gained a significant skill set: problem solving, writing, time management, verbal communication, etc.

Is this enough to get your first academic appointment?
So, you want an academic career...

**PhD achievements**

- Mastered your research topic.
- Thesis: significant contribution to knowledge.
- Maybe published a few papers.
- Gained a significant skill set: problem solving, writing, time management, verbal communication, etc.

Is this enough to get your first academic appointment?

Unfortunately, typically not; having a PhD is usually only one of the criteria ... what can you do to maximise your chance of success?

Understand what employers are seeking.
Academic jobs

- Research
- Teaching
- Administration

Demonstrate competence at all three.
Understanding Employers: Job Requirements

**Academic jobs**

- Research
- Teaching
- Administration

Demonstrate competence at all three.

**Tips**

- Look at job adverts now!
- What are the essential criteria?
- What are the desired criteria?
- What can you do now to ensure you meet them in the future?
How do you demonstrate that you are a competent researcher?

- What will employers/promotion panels look for on your CV?
- Not just about being able to do research!
How do you demonstrate that you are a competent researcher?

- What will employers/promotion panels look for on your CV?
- Not just about being able to do research!

Some things to consider:

- **Research topic**: fit to department.
- **Publication record**: number, quality, *your* contribution.
- **Your network**: collaborators.
- **Grants**: funding record, future plans.
- **Esteem indicators**: prizes, awards, invitations,...
- **Community service**: reviewing, PC membership, organisational roles,...
How can you demonstrate fit to department?
Can you take action to broaden your research?
Research

Research topic

- How can you demonstrate fit to department?
- Can you take action to broaden your research?

Tips

- Apply for positions where your research fits.
- Identify who you could work with when applying for posts.
- Collaborate to get broader expertise.
Publication record

- How can you write your paper to maximise its impact?
- What makes a strong publication record?
Publication record

- How can you write your paper to maximise its impact?
- What makes a strong publication record?

Tips

- Have a clear sales pitch in the abstract and paper itself.
- Balance number of papers and quality of outlet.
- Aim high when you can take risks.
Collaboration

- Who should you collaborate with?
- What are the advantages of collaborating?
- What are the pitfalls of collaborating?

Tips:
- Know your responsibilities.
- Select collaborators carefully.
- Agree who will contribute what and what you will each get out of it.
- Agree roles and responsibilities up front to avoid conflicts and to manage expectations.
Collaboration

- Who should you collaborate with?
- What are the advantages of collaborating?
- What are the pitfalls of collaborating?

Tips: know your responsibilities

- Select collaborators carefully.
- Agree who will contribute what *and* what you will each get out of it.
- Agree roles and responsibilities up front to avoid conflicts and to manage expectations.
What funding options are available to you now?
What funding options are available to post-docs?
What funding options are available to new/experienced academics?

Know and exploit the funding landscape.
Grants

Funding

- What funding options are available to you now?
- What funding options are available to post-docs?
- What funding options are available to new/experienced academics?

Know and exploit the funding landscape.

Tips

- Find out about options in your country.
- Take advantage of graduate consortium funding.
- Ensure you know funder requirements when applying.
- Try to take part, even informally, in funded projects. Experience!
- Read some proposal.
- Get help! Nobody writes (successful) applications in isolation.
So, you have an idea...

How do you turn it into a fundable proposal?

- Is it likely to be funded?
- Do you have the track record to deliver the research?
- Do you have the track record to manage the project?
- Can you convince funder and reviewers of this?

Tips

- Track record: identify potential weaknesses, fill them.
- Management: gain experience, smaller projects and build up?
- Get a mentor.

Getting a grant is a major boost to your CV.
So, you have an idea...

How do you turn it into a fundable proposal?

- Is it likely to be funded?
- Do you have the track record to deliver the research?
- Do you have the track record to manage the project?
- Can you convince funder and reviewers of this?

Tips

- **Track record**: identify potential weaknesses, fill them.
- **Management**: gain experience, smaller projects and build up?
- **Get a mentor**.
- **Write a one-pager**.

Getting a grant is a **major** boost to your CV.
Esteem indicators

- What are examples of esteem indicators?
- How can you proactively get them?
Esteem indicators

- What are examples of esteem indicators?
- How can you proactively get them?

Tips: Examples of esteem indicators/community service

- Reviewing: volunteer to help.
- Organisation: offer to take on roles appropriate to career stage.
- Network: meet the right people who can give you opportunities.
- Talks: invited seminars etc.
- Prizes, awards.
How do you demonstrate you are a competent teacher?

- Have you done any teaching?
- Have you taken part in assessment?
How do you demonstrate you are a competent teacher?

- Have you done any teaching?
- Have you taken part in assessment?

Tips: get involved, diversity

- **Type**: seminars, supervisions, labs, lectures.
- **Topics**: range, level.
- **Assessment**: marking, setting, quality assurance.
- **Scale**: small, medium and large groups (different teaching styles).
Tasks include:

- Student recruitment activities.
- Quality assurance.
- Manage department (senior level)
- Lots and lots of meetings!
Administration

Tasks include:

- Student recruitment activities.
- Quality assurance.
- Manage department (senior level)
- Lots and lots of meetings!

What can you do now?

- Publicity for research events.
- Find out about QA activities, shadow someone.
Take Away Message

- Think about your track record.
- Identify gaps.
- Strategically fill gaps.
- Be excited about your work.
- Inspire others.
Thank You

Credit: Flickr user Michael Mandiburg (used under CC licence)