Stride Mentoring!

Panel & Workshop Notes Overview

Sunday, 10.07.2018

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Below are notes taken by Katy RW, Arianna B and Francisco M. They have not been edited so expect some repeated content - though that probably means it's an important note! If you have questions feel free to contact Katy at wimberlm@uci.edu.

Grad Life Panel &

Picking a Grad Program Panel

Thursday, 08.23.2018

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Panelists

Katy Rodriguez Wimberly, *Rising 3rd Year Astronomy Grad Student*

Arianna Brown, *Rising 2nd Year Astronomy Grad Student*

Astrid Anker, *Rising 2nd Year Particle Grad Student*

Francisco Mercado, *Rising 2nd Year Astronomy Grad Student*

Agenda

Grad Life Discussion

1. Answer questions and discuss what life is like as a graduate student.

Picking a Grad Program Discussion

2. Answer questions and discuss the best methods for picking a graduate program.

Notes (written by Katy Rodriguez Wimberly)

- **Ice Breaker - Brainstorming**
  - **Grad Life**
    - **Sleep-deprived**
    - **Research**
      - **Publications / Results**
      - **Conferences**
    - **Quals**
      - **Classes**
      - **Study Groups**
      -
    - *What is your ideal grad life*
      - **Finances**
        - **TA Ship**
        - **Salary Package**
        - **Grants**
        - **Fellowships**
      - **Self care**
        - **Diet**
        - **Exercise**
        - **Hygiene**
      - **Work-Life Balance**
        - **Hobbies, personal relationships**
    - **Advisor relationships**
  - Make sure there is at least 2 faculty that you want to work with in the program your choose
  - Ask your advisor to connect you to potential advisors
  - Email and talk with grad students about their advisors / research
  - First year is commonly very busy but it levels out more after that

- Research shows that most academics over-estimated how many hours they work weekly
    - Unless they actually track their hours

Grad Life Questions:

How busy is grad life really?
- Commonly work over 40 hrs a week.
- Includes research, reading papers, and service work
- It's nice to be able to work less/more
- Very self-motivated work

How is TA-ship?
- Not working 20 hours a week EVERY week
- At least at UCI first years aren't required to TA upper div courses

Do grades matter?
- Grades don't matter
- There can be specific circumstances when they do (fellowships)
- Do not matter for when you're graduated and looking for a job/postdoc

What about housing? Food? Essentials?
- Depends strongly on the location
- Get a slight raise after your advancement
- The stipend is enough to pay for what you need

Housing
- You don't need to live on campus
- Some students rent a house and occupy it
- Depending on the location housing may or may not be guaranteed for a number of years

How are you handling how busy you are?
- Varys on who you're working with
- Manageable if you can be strict with how and when you work.
- Once you get past qual and classes it gets much easier and you CAN have a good balance
- Save weeks where you work on your personal life
- Make sure you find a group of friends in the program to help you with venting

- Work against isolating yourself

Picking a Program Questions:
How do we decide what fields certain schools excell at?
- Websites: look at funding within the groups (grants), and faculty size of subfield
- Papers (maybe?)
- Asking other advisors/mentor about what they know about certain schools

How did you handle being told that you should keep an open mind (in terms of field) when you're applying?
- Shouldn't be narrow when it comes to the field you're choosing but also shouldn't be too broad
- Use your undergrad research to your advantage

How do you pick up on a faculty's mindset?
- School visit is CRUCIAL
- Talk to grad students
- Look at website. Is it old? Is it up to date?

Should we contact potential advisors before hand? If so when and how?
- A simple email cannot hurt but consider more if you know you definitely want to work with that faculty and want to determine if you will have a spot in their group
- Introducing yourself at a conference before graduating
- Ask advisor to introduce you (email intro)
- Talk to students if advisor is not replying

When I'm looking at requirements is the info scattered or can I find it in one place?
- Depends on the program
- Make a spreadsheet!

Notes (written by Arianna Brown)

- When picking a grad program, be specific about research you want to do, who's lab you want to work on, etc. How do I figure out which institutions are better in which subfields?
  - Look at size of faculty in each subfield - more faculty = stronger research area; but take caution because in terms of plasma our group is small but strong, its just a smaller field
  - Look at the grants and awards of the faculty; through national awards and grants,

you can see who is very active, motivated, driven

- ○ Number of papers: somewhat correlated, but depends on subfield. E.g. astro its common, but in experimentation or instrumentation fields they are data and results dependent and that sometimes can take years before they are publishable. Also be weary of authorship rules in different subfields (eg particle/big collabs have huge authorlists but many of the authors likely didn't do much to contribute)
  - ○ Always ask professors/mentors at your institution who are working in your subfield, they will know and can recommend
- ● Should we get research experience in other areas / explore them in grad school?
  - ○ Professors urge you to explore areas to make sure you like them
  - ○ Many people switch in their first year
  - ○ "I'm a good candidate in this subfield, but I'm also open to work in this other subfield"
    - ■ Use your research to sell yourself as a researcher, but let them know if you are open to other areas
  - ○ Many of us wrote about our one research subfield and then spoke briefly about being willing to work with other faculty too…
  - ○ Make sure there are several faculty in your desired research area in case something doesn't work out (one faculty retires, doesn't have funding, you don't get along, etc.)
- ● Keep in mind faculty mindsets when applying: old/outdated websites tell you about their style as an advisor; in person grad visits help get a feel; and so does talking to grad students
- ● Should we contact potential advisors prior to applications?
  - ○ It's not entirely necessary, but you can always send an email letting them know you're applying
  - ○ Only reach out if you *really* want to work with that person to see if they're available
  - ○ Can email grad students too, they're more likely to respond and will tell you about that professor a bit more candidly
  - ○ Can ask your current research advisor to introduce you (via email, at a conference, etc.)
  - ○ Saying something like "I've seen your work, I'm wondering how that affects my research?, or maybe come visit my poster"
- ● Admission requirements: Is there a localized location with information on GRE cutoffs, GPA cutoffs, etc?
  - ○ No, it will take some digging to find this info.
  - ○ What would you consider in this spreadsheet: GPA, GRE, essays questions, length (word vs. character vs. page), fee waivers (pay to send your transcript,

GRE scores)
- ○ Can submit supplemental statement on GRE
- Fee waivers: You can email departments about the fee waiver and they will sometimes provide you with a voucher; requires lots of tax documentation and usually has a 2+ month earlier deadline than applications
- How busy is grad life?
  - ○ 40-60 hours / week seems pretty standard
  - ○ Don't forget that classes, research, reading papers, meetings, TA-ships, etc. count as this work
  - ○ Depends on the program, third quarter isn't as bad because of quals; only bad if you want straight A's, it's totally survivable
  - ○ GPA does not matter! GPAs are skewed since a B or more is considered passing,
    - ■ and no one puts GPA on their CV; they matter a bit for fellowships, and maybe some professors care a lot about it but that's a personal style
  - ○ TA-ships say 20 hours/week but typically closer to 13-14 hour weeks
  - ○ First years have low level / introductory courses as TAs; some professors really make you work for that 20 hours
- Tuition is paid for as PhD!!! And undergrad student loan payments are paused until you finish. Make sure to ask this when visiting. E.g. our dept guarantees 5 years of funding, but other depts might not.
- The salary is sufficient to live, pay for a car, eat alright, travel even a little. This is here at UCI, but it's highly dependent on other university locations. You may get a slight raise after passing your oral advancement. Living off campus can be quite affordable and actually enjoyable.
- How happy/healthy/sleep deprived are you?
  - ○ It can be tough setting your own schedule, but you really need to make sure you're doing that. Do you want one hour a day to destress, a full day out of the week, etc.
  - ○ First year was hardest
  - ○ Need to set your own boundaries and accept that there will be tough, but temporary hard moments
  - ○ Absolutely possible to eat well, have a healthy romantic relationship, exercise, etc. you just have to figure out what schedule works for you. Don't forget to remember when things are temporary
  - ○ Having a group of friends IN grad school with you is crucial (study groups, friends to vent with, etc.); grad school is a very unique experience and having friends who can understand your struggles and support you through them can make or break your experience.
- Advisor-advisee relationship

- ○ Its not in their job description to be your mentor, just your academic advisor
- ○ It's really important to not expect one person to be everything for you, it's tough
- ○ It's up to you to upwardly manage your advisor (if you email them about going to a conference, and they don't answer, it's up to you to remind them; getting angry doesn't help your career, but sending another email might)
- ○ Be sure to ask their grad students and look for red flags
- ○ You are an adult, you need to figure things out on your own; grad school is your journey, it's up to you to shape it and build your network
- What's the main motivator of the stress that keeps you up at night?
  - ○ Not being fully prepared for graduate level physics (keeping up or catching up with grad level physics)
  - ○ Overcommitting (sure I can have that plot tomorrow! Is unnecessary)
  - ○ Getting frustrated by faulty code
- Grad students have more power; we can go to faculty about issues small and large and change can happen. E.g. getting an extension for homework, working on your paper instead of the class project is understood, issues with TA workload are heard. Grad students help keep the department alive so they care about you.
- Did you give anything up for grad school?
  - ○ Many people gave up hobbies (e.g. playing an instrument), but in the name of doing something else they really like
  - ○ Important to consider family / romantic relationships when choosing academia; may have to move and that can put strain on the relationship (career or otherwise)

Notes (written by Francisco Mercado)

Grad Life & Picking a Grad Program

Grad Life: Ice Breaker
1. Sleep deprivation
2. Research
3. Quals
   a. Classes
   b. Study groups
4. Finances
5. Self-care
   a. Hygiene
   b. Diet
6. Work-life balance

7. Relationships (including with advisor)
8. Publications
9. Conferences
10. TAing (salary package)
11. Grants/fellowships

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Picking a Grad Program
1. Financial Package
2. Location
3. Advisors
4. Research area
5. Ranking
6. Grad/Faculty Ratios
7. Workload

Picking a Program Questions:
How do we decide what fields certain schools excell at?
- Websites, look at funding within the groups (grants)
- Papers (maybe?)
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- Introducing yourself at a conference before graduating
- Ask advisor to introduce you (email intro)
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- Depends on the program
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The Entire Application Process Panel & Workshop

Thursday, 08.30.2018

Panelists

Katy Rodriguez Wimberly, *Rising 3rd Year Astronomy Grad Student*

Arianna Brown, *Rising 2nd Year Astronomy Grad Student*

Astrid Anker, *Rising 2nd Year Particle Grad Student*

Francisco Mercado, *Rising 2nd Year Astronomy Grad Student*

Jessica Howard, *Rising 2nd Year Particle Grad Student*

Manuel Paul, *Rising 2nd Year Astronomy Grad Student*

Agenda

Entire Application Process Discussion

3. Answer questions and discuss what the application process is when applying to graduate programs.

Application & Letter Tracking Workshop

4. Work through setting up a spreadsheet to organize your applications and Letters of Recommendations.

Notes (written by Katy Rodriguez Wimberly)

Brainstorming: Application Process
- LOR
  - Handing in info w/ deadlines

- ○ Essays prior to applications
- Essays
  - ○ Prompts
  - ○ Lengths
  - ○ Supplemental statements
- Research Statement
- (P)GRE
  - ○ Deadlines and cost
- Deadlines
  - ○ Don't wait until the last minute
- CV/Resume
  - ○ Differences
- Decisions/where to apply
  - ○ Research compatibility
  - ○ Funding
  - ○ How do you feel about general department culture
  - ○ Location
  - ○ Personal life
- Fees/fee waivers
- Transcripts

Questions

What's easiest to forget?
- Transcripts!
  - ○ Don't wait
  - ○ Read fine print (does the school take electronic transcripts?)

Diversity statements/optional essays
- Think about how you can contribute to diversity
- Optional essays are not optional!

Did you use any letter writer that you weren't that personal with you?
- The best letters are from profs that know you personally
- Connect with faculty who aren't your research advisors
- Not all faculty are the best letter writers. Ask around about who needs more coaching when writing a letter.
- If they ask a lot from you they're probably going to write a good letter

- Important when letter writer knows people at certain universities

Can a postdoc write a letter and have the prof sign off on it?
- It's happened before
- Talk to both prof and postdoc about it and bring them together

Letter of rec deadlines!
- Some profs will wait until the last minute
- Give yourself some cushion time
- Possibly give profs an earlier deadline to avoid any letters being late
- Panelists asked face-to-face then a follow up email with materials
- Ask ahead of time ~2 months before the deadline

How does the submission process of LOR work?
- Depends on the school
- Check websites!
- Some of this info might be in the portal so create accounts

Application portals
- Write down usernames and passwords for all schools
- Make sure you create accounts early
- Scroll through application early for any info that's outdated on the websites

How many programs did you apply to?
- Panelists applied to between 4 & 11 schools
- Sometimes it's a crap shoot and you should cast a wide net and have a diverse pool of programs

Notes (written by Francisco Mercado)
Entire Application Process

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Notes (written by Arianna Brown)

- What's the easiest thing to forget to do during the application process?
  - TRANSCRIPTS
    - Need to send *ALL* of them, including if you took one class at a community college
    - They get lost often as they have to go to several divisions (grad division vs. department specifically)
    - Official vs. unofficial, paper vs. electronic - so many different requirements
    - Costs $10-20 depending on the campus
- What is a diversity statement?
  - A statement on how you're going to contribute to diversity and inclusion
  - These statements will be used for fellowships; but are usually optional and hidden
  - Includes some of the activities you've done and some things you

- ○ Optional essays are not optional or LORs (e.g. if 3 are recommended but you can do 5, might be good to have 5 just in case something bad happens); optional essays are an opportunity to get ahead of some weaknesses (e.g. bad GPA/grade in one particular class)
- Did anyone have a LOR that came from someone they didn't do research with or know very well?
    - ○ Yes but definitely try to make sure the letter writers know you in some capacity (e.g. do you do outreach together? Did you go to their office hours a lot?)
    - ○ Be sure that they get to know you; offer to meet to discuss your goals for grad school and edit your essays; show them how motivated they are
    - ○ Coach them on what you want them to write about you
    - ○ If they ask for your personal statement/other materials, that's a good sign that they write good letters
    - ○ "CAN YOU WRITE ME A STRONG LETTER OF REC?"
    - ○ Ask them to write a special one for universities you're really interested in, especially if your advisor knows someone at that university
    - ○ Working closely with the post-doc: can certainly ask the professor if they're okay with the post-doc writing the LOR, especially if the post-doc really knows you. Can ask the post-doc to bring it up with the faculty, whatever you're comfortable with.
- Deadlines
    - ○ LOR deadlines are sometimes *after* application deadlines, but many of us told them they were due earlier to remove panic
        - ■ When did you let them know / ask them for a LOR? 2 months is definitely the minimum - then reminders 1 month, 2 weeks, 1 week and every day
        - ■ Send them your essays as soon as possible, especially if you want feedback. At least 1 month out is nice. During the first ask - send draft of statements, then every time you update it (not *Every time* but at a similar cadence as the reminders) share it with them as a subtle reminder
        - ■ Can ask through email, try to get a feel of when they might write the letter; feel comfortable asking them when they're going to write them, if they want reminders, etc. approach it as you being a leader of a team of people who will help you get into grad school
        - ■ LOR submissions typically have their own portal where you can see whether they've submitted, send reminders, invite them to submit, etc. may also or instead need to send them to individual departments
- Application portals
    - ○ Make an account on the portals ASAP as that's where all of the most up to date info is - NOT ON GENERAL WEBSITES; and it takes a while to get through

them so best to get started on those now
- ■ Also remember your account names passwords as they're all different
  - ○ E.g. Some portals require pdf uploads of essays, other require that you copy and paste your essays into a text box; some websites will tell you to email the LORs but the portals require submissions
- How many do you apply to?
  - ○ Most of the applications are the same so its better to do as many as you can; panelist total # of apps range from 4-12
  - ○ More is better as it is a crapshoot (definitely want to cast a wide net)
    - ■ E.g. if a school took in a lot of particle students one year, they may limit the amount they take in the following year, regardless of how awesome the application list is
    - ■ E.g. one panelist didn't get into safety schools, but did get into all reach schools
- Moving onto the organizing spreadsheet
  - ○ PGRE
    - ■ There is a body of research that shows it is not an indicator of research acumen;
      - ● one NSF postdoctoral study on distribution of PGRE scores, one opinion piece from a Harvard faculty about how his high performing undergrads failed the PGRE, and research published by ETS (GRE org) that shows they can better predict your gender, socioeconomic status & ethnicity than your ability to be a good researcher
      - ● Can write a statement on this as a supplemental essay
  - ○ Potential Faculty Advisor
    - ■ Can email professors and set up skype sessions to hear what they're working on now (often heir websites are out of date and publications aren't representative of what they're excited about right now)
    - ■ Can check conferences, twitter, Skype, etc. for talks by that professor to see what they're talking about now
  - ○ Resumes/CVs
    - ■ A place to include extra info that you can't speak to in your essays (due to length)
    - ■ Talks and poster sessions
    - ■ Roles / Leadership / Clubs
    - ■ A website with PDFs to posters, and other info
    - ■ A website/resume can make a difference between two candidates
    - ■ No high school stuff or anything past 4-5 years

- can have an abbreviated and a long version
- Resumes contain more information on the roles and responsibilities whereas CVs focus briefly listing education, science, presentations, honors and awards.

The Grad Program & Fellowship Application Essays Workshop

Thursday, 09.06.2018

Panelists

Katy Rodriguez Wimberly, *Rising 3rd Year Astronomy Grad Student*

Arianna Brown, *Rising 2nd Year Astronomy Grad Student*

Jessica Howard, *Rising 2nd Year Particle Grad Student*

Kyle Kabasares, *Rising 2nd Year Astronomy Grad Student*

Agenda

Board Activity - 30 minutes

a. Write Topics from Audience

b. As a group discuss why the topic is or isn't great to include in the essay

Grad Program Application Essays Q&A - 20 minutes

Fellowships Application Essays Q&A - 20 minutes

Small Breakout Groups - 20 minutes

Notes (written by Katy Rodriguez Wimberly)

Common Physics / Astronomy Grad Fellowships

- NSF GFRP
- Ford
- Hertz
- NASA

Brainstorming

- Know your audience!
- Personal History Statements
  - Why will I be a good scientist? / Good person to be around?
  - Science
    - CV related items
      - Papers, thesis, REUs
      - Conference presentations (national and campus wide)
    - Specialized courses, coding, hands on experimental techniques, complex modeling software
      - What did you learn?
      - Tenacity, grit, perseverance
        - Make it positive!
    - How does your work fit into the big picture? Do you understand the background?
  - Personal
    - Personal story / event that changed you as a scientist or made you want to become a scientist, study this field, ect.
    - Informed you as a scientist
    - Feel free to highlight areas of your life that are not related to science
      - Show that you're interested and well-rounded
      - Use these to demonstrate non-cognitive skills that give you potential to be a great scientist
    - AVOID BEING GENERAL WITH YOUR EXPERIENCES
      - Give concrete examples
      - 'Show don't tell'
    - Leadership roles?
    - Club affiliations?
    - Volunteer experiences?
    - NSF GFRP Application Specific - Broader Impacts

- 50% of the NSF Essay
- Past experience in helping others (outreach)
- Preferably science or identity related
- DO NOT GO TOO BIG
  - Needs to be achievable
- Should be tied to your goals and previous experiences
- Statement of Purpose
  - Science
    - If you use jargon, make sure the context of the sentence describes the function of that jargon
      - Make sure the context is on point!
      - Refer back to knowing your audience
    - *Grad School Specific (GSS)*: does not need to be a proposal (and probably shouldn't be)
      - Don't want to limit in case you become interested in other areas
    - Research Experiences
      - Inform your curiosities
      - Areas that you might be interested in based on previous experiences
      - Name *several* professors you'd want to work with and why
      - Your skills are likely interdisciplinary
      - Turn negatives to positives
  - Personal
    - A few sentences at the end that mention your career / field goals
      - *General example:* 'all of these experiences helped me realize I want to continue through academia' -or- '... to become a leader in machine learning.'
      - Tailor this to the specific department

Q&A

- Definitely talk about your hurdles and how overcoming them strengthens you
- Reach out to faculty and grad students to help determine where you apply to
  - Faculty group page
  - Grad student directories
- Don't start with the beginning

Research Panel

Monday, 09.24.2018

Panelists

Katy Rodriguez Wimberly, *Rising 3rd Year Astronomy Grad Student*

Arianna Brown, *Rising 2nd Year Astronomy Grad Student*

Jessica Howard, *Rising 2nd Year Particle Grad Student*

Kyle Kabasares, *Rising 2nd Year Astronomy Grad Student*

Genevieve DeGrandchamp, *Rising 2nd Year Plasma Grad Student*

Astrid Anker, *Rising 2nd Year AstroParticle Grad Student*

Francisco Mercado, *Rising 2nd Year Astronomy Grad Student*

Sophia Nasr, *Rising 2nd Year AstroParticle Grad Student*

Agenda

Ice Breaker & Introductions - 30 minutes

    c. Introductions

    d. 2 Truths & 1 Lie

Graduate Research Q&A - 30 minutes

Undergraduate Research Q&A - 30 minutes

Notes (written by Katy Rodriguez Wimberly)

- What's the difference between research in grad & undergrad
  - More exploration opportunities in undergrad
  - More guidance

- What's the day to day
  - Coding / Lab
  - Reading
  - Writing
- What's the work life balance
  - Autonomy
  - Some overload on work then take days off
  - Some work less per day but more days a week
  - Create a schedule for yourself
  - Align your time with your priorities
    - Don't say you don't have time, say it's not your priority
- Can theory and experimental/observational interact?
- Post PhD Goals
  - Will influence what you do during grad research
  - Census
    - National Labs
    - Academia
      - Research University
      - Teaching University
      - Community College
      - Education & Public Outreach
    - Industry
- ADVISORS MATTER
  - Talk to them prior
  - Talk to their grad students
  - Ask to sit in on a group meeting
  - Ask to do a shadow day
  - Be open with what you need / want
- EPO
  - Volunteer with already established orgs
  - Figure out what your passionate about and take steps toward pursuing those passions
    - Talk to people
    - Figure out actions

Notes (written by Francisco Mercado)

Research Panel

What's the difference between research in undergrad and grad school?

- Undergrad:
  - figuring out what you're doing and what you like
  - Don't necessarily need to continue research. It's understandable if you stop after a summer
- Grad school:
  - The research is your work and you're judged for it
  - Follow through is very important
  - You have more of a responsibility to get thing right

What does research look like from day to day?
- Lots of coding! Plots, Plots and more Plots!
- Hardware design for some
- Collaborating with other students
- Reading and Writing
- Learning to communicating science

How does the work-life balance work?
- You have a lot of autonomy with your work schedule
- You can go hard for five days and take the weekends off or work a little less every day but six days out of the week
- Aligning your time with your priorities really helps a ton