Sharing experiences from being a post-doc in computer science

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My Timeline

2006–2010   BSs
2010–2012   MSc
2012–2016   PhD
2016-Present   Visiting Instructor

<u>2016–2020</u>   <u>PostDoc</u>

2020-Present   Software Engineer

The beginning

- Fresh out of the PhD – *what a relief!*
- Ready for a new start – *feeling excited!*
  - the higher salary helps $$$ – still less than industry though
- Might find yourself enjoying being **called** a *doctor*
  - Now you are one of them…
    - Dr. Foivos Zakkak
    - Foivos Zakkak PhD
    - …you have to let the people know
      (believe it or not it changes how people treat you in some places)
    - …usually it doesn't last long
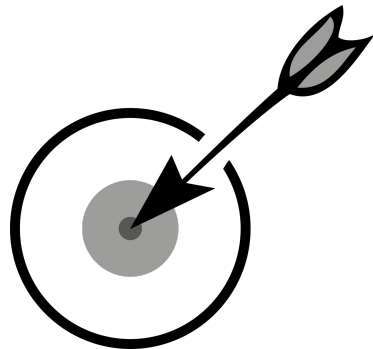
The Reality Check

- Need to participate in getting funding
  - That's how you get paid BTW – without funding you might get fired
  - Small programs might last 1 year
  - Bigger ones typically last for 3 years
- Need to publish good articles – necessary in academia
- Spend a lot of time in leading projects and helping others
  - The time you can go *in the zone* is significantly reduced
  - You need to context switch between different projects/ideas
  - More value in unblocking students and research staff than developing
- Might be asked to do some teaching as well
  - A great opportunity to train new people in your domain
  - But takes time out of research

Responsibilities

- Brainstorm and think about the big picture
- Prepare early prototypes to explore the potential of ideas
- Keep grad students busy
  - Ensure they are not blocked
  - Ensure there are new ideas to be picked up
- Keep grad students on track
  - Mentoring/Supervision
- Increase funding

Your Ultimate Goal

Timeframe: Typically 2-4 years

- Improve your CV
  - *Prove* that you can lead an independent project
    This comes handy when job hunting outside academia as well
- Get connected
  - Increase your visibility
  - Many people you meet during PhD/Postdoc
    keep popping up in your professional life
- Make a living

The Pros

- Travel around the 🌍!
  - Conferences
  - Workshops
  - Project meetings
  - Opportunities to collaborate-with/work-at another institute
- Flexible working hours
- Ability to work remotely - usually in *hybrid* mode
- Autonomy - No micromanagement or even management
- Freedom to choose what you like
- Free licenses for multiple tools
- Plenty of days off - in some places *practically unlimited*

The Cons

- Travel around the 🌍!
  - It gets tiring after a while
  - Hard with young kids
- Flexible working hours
- Autonomy – No micromanagement or even management
- Plenty of days off – in some places *practically unlimited*
  - Many people find it hard to manage the above 3 – needs self-discipline
  - Feeling guilty for not working enough
  - Finding it hard to define how much work is enough work
    - I suggest tracking working hours and avoiding over hours
    - If you feel like the hours are not enough you are probably trying to do more than you can. Rethink your goals and priorities
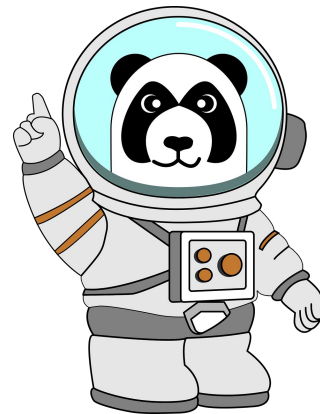
Some More Cons

- Feels like nothing ever finishes
  - Hard to feel rewarded
- Most often not enough time to do things the *right way*
  - prototype -> publish -> discard — more common than you'd like
- Sometimes you need to drop a piece of work that took significant effort
- Getting funding
  - Spending a lot of time to make your ideas fit in calls
  - Low acceptance rates
- Paper and proposal rejections take a toll
- Compensation way below the market

Hints

- Celebrate small wins
- Take a break after a proposal/paper submission
- Track working hours
- Follow some routine
- Get time off – you deserve it – that publication can wait
- Keep in touch with colleagues / fellow postdocs
  - Try to collaborate with them
- Network at conferences

Acknowledgements

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