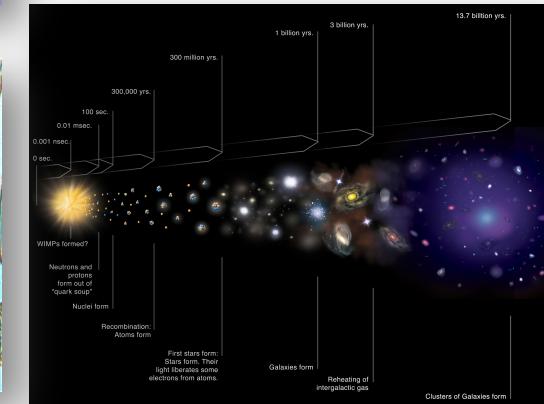
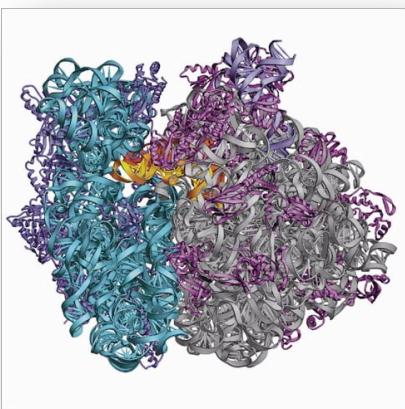
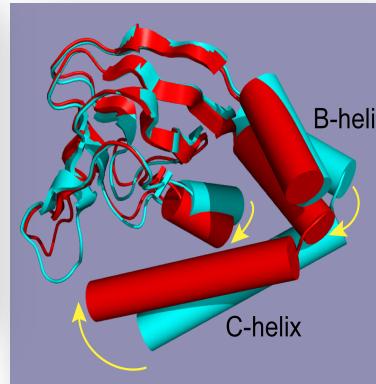
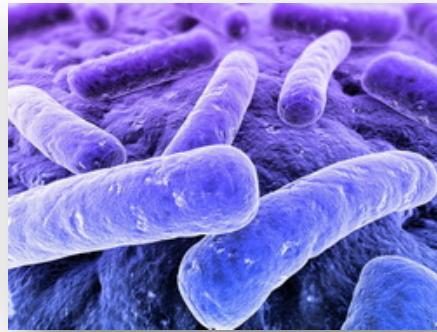
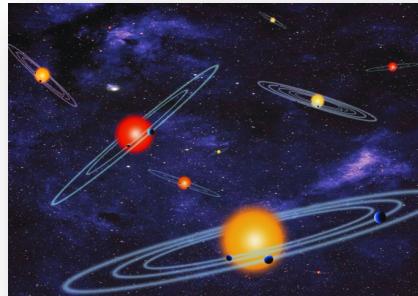


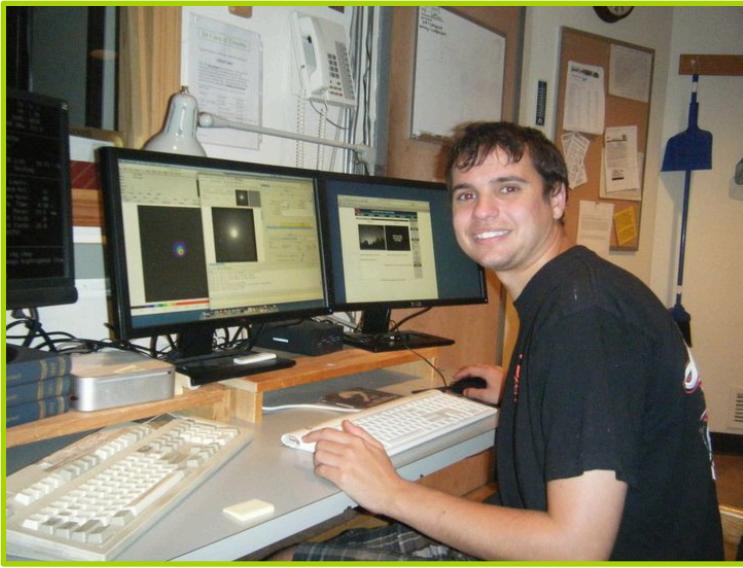
# Being an RA in the Physical and Natural Sciences

UW TA/RA Conference

September 21-22, 2015



# Introductions



Eddie Schwieterman  
Astronomy (2010)  
[eschwiet@uw.edu](mailto:eschwiet@uw.edu)



Vega Shah  
Oceanography (2011)  
[vs1@uw.edu](mailto:vs1@uw.edu)

# Icebreakers

- ↗ Please share your:
  - ↗ Name
  - ↗ Department
  - ↗ Background (e.g., what were you doing last year?)
  - ↗ If you'd like, one surprising thing about you



# Backgrounds & Pathways to an RA



# Outline & Goals

- ↗ Approaching common RA situations
- ↗ Preparing for your next (or first) meeting with your supervisor (advisor, PI, or “boss”)
- ↗ Well-being & inclusivity
- ↗ Time management tips
- ↗ Useful RA resources

Outline  
Outline  
Outline  
Outline  
Outline

# RA Situations

- ↗ Break up into groups of 3-4
- ↗ Your group will be assigned 2 situations
- ↗ Role play and then discuss how you would handle this situation
- ↗ Discuss as a group

# RA Situation 1<sup>+</sup>

- ↗ It's been 5 weeks since you started as a PhD student and RA. You've already started working on your research, and you love it. But your supervisor has been sending you e-mails frequently, including during the weekends. Sometimes he asks you to come see him in his office right away. You're new to the university and Seattle, and you feel like you have no life. Now, this is the third time your supervisor asks you to come see him in his office on Saturday. You're heading to your supervisor's office, how would you bring up the topic of work-life balance?
- ↗ **2 roles: Student and Student's PI**

*<sup>+</sup>Credit to Derek Sutherland for original scenario*

# RA Situation 2<sup>+</sup>

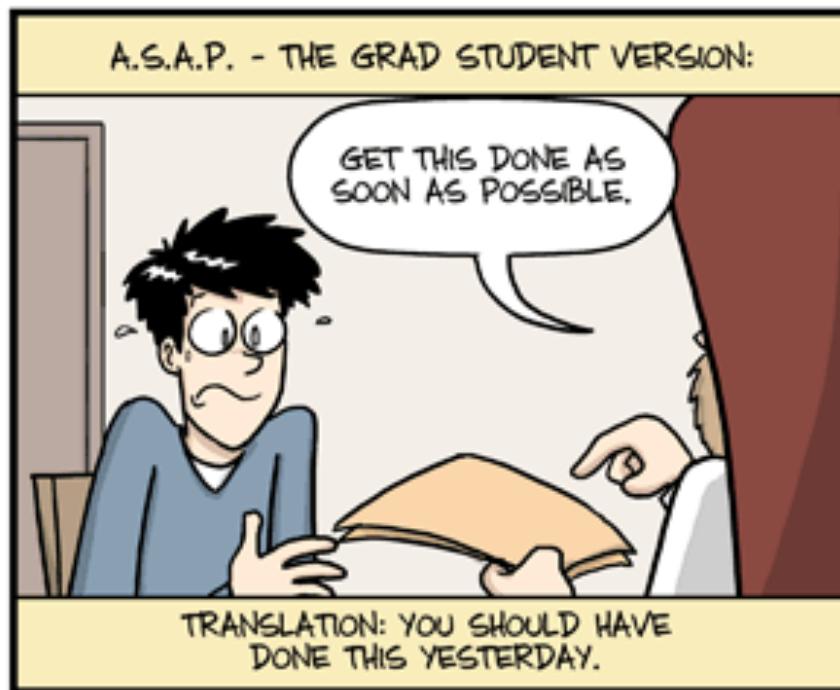
- You're close to the end of your first year of PhD program. You've been working really hard on your research, and you're starting to collect publishable data. You presented your results in front of your supervisor (PI) and your peers in a group meeting. Your supervisor says, "that's not how it should turn out, you must be doing something wrong. You should try a different approach." But you are sure that you have been following the correct procedure, and you have enough data to support your hypothesis. Taking a different direction will take you even longer time for you to get started on your first paper. What would you do?
- **3 roles: Student, student's PI, peer**

*<sup>+</sup>Credit to Derek Sutherland for original scenario*

# RA Situation 3<sup>+</sup>

- Older graduate students and postdocs in your lab are continuously asking for your help on their projects to the point where it is interfering with your own work. They are your friends and so you always tend to lend a helping hand, but it has gone too far. You have told them before that you don't have time to help them with their projects, but they keep asking since your PI is pushing them to get their projects done more than yours. How do you ensure you keep enough of your time for your own work?      *\*Credit to Derek Sutherland for original scenario*
- **4 roles: Student, Student's PI, Fellow Grads, Postdocs**

# RA Situation Discussion



# First (or next) Meeting with Advisor

- ↗ Split into a group of 3-4. Working together, identify:
  1. short and long term expectations/goals from your relationship with your advisor
  2. questions to ask advisor based on these expectations and goals
  3. Questions you want answered but might be too embarrassed to ask advisor/PI
- ↗ 5-10 minute small group discussion
- ↗ 5-10 minute large group discussion

# Advisor Meeting Discussion

## WHEN TO MEET WITH YOUR ADVISOR Is there ever a good time?

### Beginning of the week

**Pro:** Get it over with quickly

**Con:** You have a guaranteed date with work on Sundays

|   |   |   |    |   |     |     |
|---|---|---|----|---|-----|-----|
| M | T | W | TH | F | Sat | Sun |
|---|---|---|----|---|-----|-----|

### Mid-week

**Pro:** Good balance. Gives you time to work on feedback

**Con:** Your advisor will probably not show up (actually, this might be a pro)

### End of the week

**Pro:** You might actually have something to show by then.

**Con:** You might not (!)

### Saturday/Sunday

**Pro:** There is no "pro".

**Con:** Your advisor is a workaholic maniac. Good luck with that.

# Well-Being

- ↗ **Imposter Syndrome** - can be defined as a collection of feelings of inadequacy that persist even in face of information that indicates that the opposite is true. It is experienced internally as chronic self-doubt, and feelings of intellectual fraudulence.\*
- ↗ Psychological research done in the early 1980s estimated that two out of five successful people consider themselves frauds and other studies have found that 70 percent of all people feel like impostors at one time or another\*\*
- ↗ **Perfectionism/Procrastination:** Putting off tasks for fear of not getting them just right. Stems from fear of failure and an all-or-nothing mentality. It can often lead to low self esteem, anxiety and depression.

\*source: <https://counseling.caltech.edu/general/InfoandResources/Impostor>

\*\* source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Impostor\\_syndrome](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Impostor_syndrome)

# Well-Being & Inclusivity

- ↗ **Micro-aggressions** are everyday exchanges—including words and actions—that denigrate and exclude individuals based on their membership in a group or class of individuals.\*
- ↗ **Stereotype threat** - is a situational predicament in which people are or feel themselves to be at risk of confirming negative stereotypes about their social group.\*\*
  - ↗ Research shows those most people susceptible to stereotype threat perform better when they become familiar with the idea

\*From UW/UAW 4121 contract: <http://www.uaw4121.org/know-your-rights/contract/>

\*\* Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stereotype\\_threat](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stereotype_threat)

# Inclusivity Scenario 1

- You're working in a lab where the supervisor always seems to assign the menial tasks to the one woman in the group. At first, it seemed like a coincidence, but now it has become a clear pattern.  
What do you do? \*Assume you are yourself

# Inclusivity Scenario 2

- Several members of your lab have been competing for a prestigious graduate fellowship. The one student who wins an award is a member of an underrepresented group. One of your labmates states it's "probably because they're a minority". What is your response?

# Imposter Scenario

- Your advisor wants you to take your general exam so you can advance to candidacy, but you don't think you're prepared enough yet. You've been putting this off for three quarters now, and the delay threatens to significantly impact the timeline to your PhD. What do you do?

# Well-Being Resources

- ↗ Hall Health Mental Health:
  - ↗ <http://depts.washington.edu/hpccweb/project/mental-health-clinic/>
  - ↗ Phone: (206) 543-5030
- ↗ Counseling Center:
  - ↗ <http://www.washington.edu/counseling/>
  - ↗ Phone: 206-543-1240
  - ↗ Location: 401 Schmitz Hall
- ↗ Perfectionism/Procrastination groups:
  - ↗ <http://depts.washington.edu/hpccweb/procrastinationperfectionism-group/>

# Time-Management



[www.phdcomics.com](http://www.phdcomics.com)

# Time-Management Tips

- ↗ Weekly meetings with advisor
- ↗ Prioritize goals
- ↗ Schedule your work like your other commitments
- ↗ Don't fight against your internal clock
- ↗ Have realistic goals & backup plans.
- ↗ Cut yourself slack when you can't meet goals and re-evaluate.

# Goal Setting

- ↗ Helpful, Realistic Goal:
  - ↗ I will have a draft of my methods section done by the end of next week
- ↗ Unhelpful Goal:
  - ↗ I will publish a first-author paper this year
- ↗ Why the distinction?

# Some Online Resources

- ↗ Graduate School – Mentor Handbook and Mentoring Memos
  - ↗ <http://www.grad.washington.edu/profdev/mentoring/>
- ↗ Graduate School Professional Development Events
  - ↗ <http://www.grad.washington.edu/profdev/>
- ↗ Graduate student funding and travel grants
  - ↗ <https://www.grad.washington.edu/students/fa/otherfunding.shtml>
- ↗ PhDs.org Advice and tips:
  - ↗ <http://www.phds.org/graduate-school-success>