

Coffee & Bagels with a Mentor: Judith Simcox, PhD

November 8th, 2018

10-11am HSEB 5100B

Dr Simcox shared with us her journey leading to her new position as an Assistant Professor position in the Biochemistry Department at the University of Wisconsin Madison. She stressed out the importance of 3 points:

- Knowing how to communicate what is important. You need to be able to communicate the impact of your research. More than through high impact publication, you are showing the impact of your science through giving talk at Conferences. Remember that the point of your talk is to teach something to someone.
- Realize what people are looking for. You need to be able to show some leadership experience, as well as training and mentoring students, and teaching. Dr Simcox built those skills through developing programs for the Native American Research Internship (NARI) and SACNAS and being an adjunct professor in Biology at Westminster College. Finally learn to communicate your achievements. You need to know what you look like on paper.
- Build a circle of mentors. You need several to move to the next step. Determine what skills you need to advance, identify who is the best person at it and build a relation with them through mentorship. Dr Simcox has 12 mentors, her mentors called people to tell that she was going on the job market.

When you are going to a national conference, practice 3 statements:

- Research statement: prepare 2 forms 1) A one line research statement; 2) a 3 minute research statement which communicates broader ideas on the field
- Personal statement: something interesting about yourself that is memorable
- Passion statement: how you want to personally change the world. Because people bond through passions the most.

On the chalk talk: a successful chalk talk is coming half from the presentation, half from the questions you get. You don't control the questions you will get. But see it as an opportunity to determine how the department will help you grow and what are the resources available. The chalk talk is school dependent. Some schools ask for a power point presentation, some for just 4 slides, and the majority wants a board presentation. Ask for 10-15 min to get the board ready before hand. Have a clear aesthetic and the title. At first, tell people "I am going to ask for 3 min of your time for attention", and practice to speak exactly for 3 min. You need to take command of the room and to tell a story. It shows how you deal with pressure and it permits you to get feedback. You should show your vision: the mentorship potential, project good for a grad student, project for a separate RO1 which is more challenging and would be good for a Postdoc to work on and take with them.

Additional comments:

- To build her national network, Dr Simcox helped organizing national conferences through SACNAS.
- Start early to work on your research statement, it should be different than grants, it is a big picture idea, start to think about it as soon as possible.
- Plan for failure: practice in small schools to learn from your mistakes and improve for the future.