



Course 1: The Strategic Postdoc

Module 1: Positioning Yourself for the Postdoc

Session 4: Prepare to leave your PhD

Activity 4.1: Negotiating with your PI

Carefully read the following case studies and answer the reflection questions below:

1. Mary is a fifth-year trainee in the neuroscience department and during her PhD, she made two important discoveries. After all her hard work, she's ready to begin writing her thesis and finalizing her first author publication (about her first discovery). She's 11 months away from defending her thesis. However, her research mentor, who is up for tenure, wants to add more experiments to her manuscript so they can submit it to the scientific journal *Cell*. The PI thinks this would benefit both herself and Mary. As Mary starts to work on the extra experiments, she's finding it hard to balance her time between doing experiments and writing her manuscript and thesis. She feels that if this continues to be the case, she won't be able to meet her deadlines.
 - a. What is the advisor's main objective? What is Mary's main objective?
 - b. Do you think Mary can complete her PhD and publish the paper on time? Come up with two possible strategies to help Mary sort out the role conflicts with her PI.
 - c. What resources does Mary have to help her through this challenge?
 - d. If you were in Mary's shoes, what steps would you have taken to avoid or manage some of the conflicts she is facing?

2. Noah is a sixth-year graduate student who has already fulfilled all of the requirements for graduation and published a first author paper, and he's ready to schedule his thesis defense. In preparation to graduate, given his strong interest in the field, he decides to apply for a competitive two-year science policy fellowship that would start in 3 months. His PI, Shawna, had a meeting with him and asked him to stay 6-10 more months in order to complete a few additional experiments needed for a second manuscript. He agrees with his PI that this would be a great opportunity for him and he would like to do that. Right after his meeting with his PI, he found out that he was awarded the full-time science policy fellowship. But there is a stipulation that he must begin the program as scheduled and if he can't, he must decline the offer. Noah feels very bad about the possibility of breaking his commitment to his advisor, but he also knows he wants to pursue a career in science policy and not academia.
 - a. What is Shawna's main objective? What is Noah's main objective?
 - b. How can Noah negotiate with Shawna to reach a compromise?

- c. If you were in Noah's shoes, what steps would you have taken to avoid or manage some of the conflicts here?

3. Wei is a seventh-year PhD candidate who wants to do a postdoc and is graduating soon. She sent her PI John a draft of her thesis for feedback weeks ago but hasn't heard back from him. Her defense is approaching and she invited him to her practice talk. However, John told her that he was too busy writing a grant and he couldn't make her practice talk and sent her a short email with minimal feedback about her thesis. She's terrified because she doesn't have her PI's input on her thesis and is not sure how to effectively prepare for her defense.
 - a. What is John's main objective? What is Wei's main objective?

 - b. What are the main challenges presented in this case? Briefly explain.

 - c. What options does Wei have in order to solve the challenges described in question 3b? Briefly explain.

4. Rob is ready to graduate; he has already published a first author paper and scheduled his dissertation exam. He knows that he needs postdoctoral training in order to be competitive for the career that he wants. He has heard from his classmates that PIs are an important resource to leverage when trying to secure a postdoctoral position and can help you think about the type of postdoc that you need, give you feedback on your postdoc job talk, and write recommendations. Rob decides to coordinate a meeting with his PI to talk about his career goals and see how his mentorship can help him get there. The PI tells Rob that he's super busy as he is putting his tenure packet together, but he can give Rob a 30 minute slot to talk about his career. They meet, and Rob tells his PI about his career goals and asks for advice. His PI looks at Rob and tells him that when he graduated, he didn't have any help from his PhD advisor, and that he was able to navigate everything and succeed in his career goals. He didn't understand what Rob was asking from him, and he was totally confident that Rob would be able to get to where he needs without his help. Now, Rob feels very frustrated and doesn't know what to do next.
 - a. What is the advisor's main objective? What is Rob's main objective?

 - b. What are the main challenges presented in this case? Briefly explain.

 - c. If you were in Rob's shoes, how would you solve the challenges presented in this problem? What resources would you have available?