

# Networking

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# Main Source

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- Phil Agre's essay: "Networking on the Network: A Guide to Professional Skills for PhD Students"
- <http://polaris.gseis.ucla.edu/pagre/network.html>

# Outline

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- Basic steps to form your own network
- Networking and your dissertation
- How to get a job

# The Basic Steps

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- Do some good research
- Build a community around your research topic:
  - Identify some relevant people
  - Write to these people individually
  - Meet each person face-to-face
  - Exchange drafts
  - Follow up

# Identify Relevant People

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- Mutual interest in research topic
- People whose work you cite
- Ask people with good networks
- Be on the lookout while reading papers, bibliographies, etc.
- Don't limit your network to a narrow field

# “Articulating Commonalities”

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- After developing a long list of potential colleagues, carefully study their work
- Identify what elements your research has in common with their specific research area
- Practice explaining your research in terms that stress those commonalities
- Points of disagreement can be discussed more rationally once this framework is established

# “Structural Holes”

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- People who should know each other but don't
- Your research can fill a hole by building relationships in several different directions
- Don't put all your eggs in one basket

# Help People Find You

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- Web page
  - Contact info
  - Links to department, lab, projects, organizations, etc.
  - Citations to publications (and papers themselves if possible)
  - Links to relevant resources
  - Don't include personal info on a professional web page



# Write to People Individually

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- Choose a person cited in one of your research papers
- Send that person a copy of your article
- Include a statement of how your work overlaps with theirs
- Don't make them feel pressured to respond
- Ask if they'll be at an upcoming conference

# Meet Each Person Face-to-Face

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- At conferences, attend talks of people you want to meet
- Take notes and think of questions to ask after the talk
  - Questions about their work
  - Who they're working with
  - What your work has in common with theirs
- Avoid negativity
- Don't expect too much from one conversation
- Exchange business cards at the end

# Socializing at Conferences

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- Make sure you have an answer to the obvious “What are you working on?”
  - Practice explanations of various lengths (10 seconds, 1 minute, 5 minutes, etc.)
- Try to get them to talk first, and then explain your work in terms that focus on the research interests that you share in common
- Introduce people to one another
- Look for the person who is chairing the session at which you’re speaking
- Workshops can provide a smaller, more focused event that makes it easier to mix with people

# Exchange Drafts

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- “Secret Paper Passing Network”
- If contact is about equal to you in the research hierarchy, exchange drafts of new papers
  - Email a draft and ask if they have any comments (don’t pressure them to respond)
  - If you receive a draft, take time to make useful comments.

# Commenting on a Paper

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- Express your thoughts honestly but use careful wording to avoid offense
  - “Perhaps you can clarify this by...”
  - “I’m concerned that this particular audience will perceive this as...”
  - “A topic for future research here might be...”
- Suggest additional relevant references

# Follow up

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- Find ways to be useful to people in your network
  - Pass things along to them
  - Mention their work to others
  - Get your dept. to invite them to speak
- Keep it low-key
  - Don't pressure anyone into anything
  - Phrases like "I know you must be very busy, but..." can sound like emotional manipulation
  - Don't complain
- Exchange favors out of courtesy and respect, not politicking

# Norms of Humility

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- Say “we” instead of “I”
- Don’t express your opinions as facts
  - “I personally think that...”
- Give credit to others
- Deflect praise
- Emphasize the intellectual, rather than personal, reasons for your work

# Getting Credit for Your Work

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- Publish promptly
- Do your networking
  - Less likely for someone else to get credit for an idea if you've circulated it in written form
- Natural tension between cooperation and competition (over credit for new ideas)
  - Networking helps manage this tension



# Emerging Themes

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- Fame and fortune awaits those who notice a trend in their field, put a name to it, and organize people around it
- Four qualities in such a person:
  - Their own research is an example of the pattern
  - They think carefully about other people's research
  - They network with others to stay up-to-date with them
  - They are smart enough to notice the pattern

# Consultation

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- Write a survey paper that describes the pattern you see emerging, names it, and explains how existing projects fit within it
- Send it individually to the researchers affected by it
- If there's interest, organize a workshop or small professional meeting around the theme
  - Send a draft announcement to ten people whose participation is critical and ask for advice/guidance
  - Modify the draft based on responses

# Edit a Book?

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- Approach a well-connected senior researcher and propose to edit a book together
- How to find an appropriate publisher?
  - Ask people in your network
- Lot of work for little money, but a good experience

# Getting a Public Voice

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- Speak to “normal” people
  - Give talks to community groups
  - Write articles for newspapers and magazines
  - Be interviewed by the media
  - Be able to discuss your field with people in social situations
- Popularize work in your field?
  - Requires a very different kind of talent and lots of networking in a different area
  - Wide-circulation newspapers/magazines tend to stick with people they know
  - Easiest way to start is to have a web site to circulate your work
  - Colleagues may discourage you from writing such works until you get tenure

# “Invisible College”

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- You may be closer to people at other universities than you are to the person down the hall
  - They're the ones who share your research interests, review your papers, write letters of reference when you're up for tenure
- Breaking down walls between universities opens up opportunities, but can there be too much?
  - Diversity is good, and there tends to be diversity only if new ideas can colonize at a small number of universities without too much pressure from the outside to conform

# Dissertation in Networking

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- Source: Networking on the Network: A Guide to Professional Skills for PhD Students, Phil Agre, UCLA

# Two Approaches in Writing Dissertation

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- Chop your dissertation into journal articles
- Combine your publications into dissertation
- Either way most of the dissertations will get stuck on a library shelf

# A Fact

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- When you produce a dissertation, the most important thing you produce is yourself as a new member of the research profession generally, and of a particular research community
- In short: You are rehearsing a professional voice



# Networking

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- The chicken-and-egg problem
  - Define your topic, rehearse your voice
  - Build your network, get feedback
- Start small and then work back and forth between the chicken side and the egg side
  - Start to build your network as soon as you have a conference paper to present
  - Contact a few especially promising individuals

# Common Bad Feelings

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- It feels like you are pretending to do research rather than really doing it
  - It is because you are changing from one social identity to another, and from one professional persona to another
- You experience a conflict between your own personal interests and the demands that the institution places on you
  - Do your networking
  - Internalize the ideas and voices of the researchers in your field whose work you respect
  - Become involved in the activities of your profession
  - Remember: You get to choose your environment, which consists on large measure of the members of your network

# In the Beginning of the Dissertation

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- Graduate students tend to choose too big a topic, then get frustrated when they have to give up most of the parts
- Remember: People will look at what you have accomplished, but more importantly, they will look at your method
- Therefore: Your ideas and methods should generalize
- Present your thesis as an example, a case study, an illustration, of the more general theme that you have identified, and take care to explain the generality of your theme

# In the Middle of the Dissertation

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- You keep encounter new points
  - Terms need to be defined, methodology needs to be explained, objections need to be anticipated, patterns need to be identified, distinctions need to be made, and unanswered questions need to be acknowledged and posed as problems for futures work
- You are integrating all the many voices that will lay claim to your topic, and you are sorting out a conceptual framework for your research program that addresses all of those voices in a coherent way
- It is crucial for the formation of your professional voice

# In the End of the Dissertation

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- You lose your ability to explain your project to other people
- You read another person's work and suddenly develop a powerful sense that this other person has already done the same project as yours, or even a project that makes your own obsolete
  - Because of your total immersion in the logic of your research, you are engaging with the other person's work in greater depth than you are probably used to
  - As a result, you are tuning into their thinking at a deeper level than is normally possible
- You feel that your entire dissertation needs to be rewritten

# Academic Language

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- The ability to use the language is a valuable commodity
- Style vs. idea
- Academic languages exhibit network effects
  - The theoretical vocabulary of a particular author can become the de facto standard of conversation in a certain field
- Focus your attention on the communities you want to join

# Topic – Networking and Job Hunting

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- Why is it important?
- Job Announcements
- Applying
- Interviews
- Big Picture
- Negotiating

# Why networking

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- A network is a circuit through which things flow: ideas, energy, dialogue, information, favors, and so on.
- Other good things:
  - Job openings
  - Informal invitations
  - Postdoc fellowships



# Job Announcements

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- Study job posting
- Learn to speak different languages
  - Articulate their key insights in plain language
  - Frame your idea in relation to that
  - Networking helps you to practice beforehand
- Which school to apply?
  - Priorities
  - Get information from your networks
  - Get a list of faculties, find out which ones are close to yourself

# Applying

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- Cover letter – articulate a clear case for the fit between yourself and the department
  - Draw on your experience of talking to different people in your network to come up with lots of different honest ways of explaining yourself.
- Reference letters
- You may find that your network contacts will volunteer to put in an informal good word for you.
  - (e.g. send a simple email to their friend in the department where you are applying, say “this person is smart and I think would make a good match for your department”.)

# Interviews

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- Attitude is important
  - Do not think of the interview as a way to get a job
  - Think of it as an opportunity to establish long-term professional relationships with the people in the dept.
  - You need to establish a point of commonality with everyone you meet.
  - You get to practice when you have a network
- Three parts: public presentation, individual conversations, and socializing.

# Strategies in Interview

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- Public presentation
  - Non-specialist audience
  - Questioners want to know if you share any potential conversation topics
- One-on-one conversation
  - Find the intellectual contact between the two of you
  - Gently take control of the conversation
  - Alternate between telling facts about your professional life and asking questions
- Socializing
  - A test of whether you can tone down the intensity

# Big Picture

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- As a broad generalization, faculty wants to hire people whose interests are closer to their own
- Close interests: develop a deep bond of professional solidarity
- No potential collaboration: establish friendly relations, and find a single point of contact
- Middle: read their work, and think deeply about the values and directions that you share with them
- The best way to help people appreciate the quality of your work is to converse with them in their own languages

# Negotiating

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- Talk with department head at an early point to find out the negotiation process
- Prepare for the negotiation by talking to 3 or 4 members of the department
- Get advice from your thesis committee members
- Understand what flexibility the dept. does and does not have.

Thank you!

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Questions

