

Case Study

Instructions:

1. Each group identifies a student-facilitator to report back main discussion points/take-homes, and a faculty-facilitator to help discussion
 2. Student-facilitator reads out loud the mentee perspective on Page 1, group discussions begin
 3. About half-way (we will indicate this via message to the breakout rooms ~ 6:05pm), facilitator goes to Page 2, and reads out case's mentor perspective, discussion continues
 4. Both facilitators encourage each participant to make at least one comment about the case as the discussion progresses – you will get the most from this exercise if you participate, raise questions, have your opinions heard, and discuss them.
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Time-management: career exploration and work-life balance

Mentee perspective (Alex): Alex is a 4th year PhD student in a graduate program that typically takes 5.5 years to complete. His mentor, Dr. Smith, is a tenured faculty member whose lab has 6 members. When Alex first interviewed with Dr. Smith, she seemed open and friendly. She discussed how important it is for students to maintain their work-life balance, and plan for their future careers. Impressed by an outlook with its emphasis on life beyond graduate school, Alex joined the lab 3 years ago. In general, Alex has met deadlines, and has made progress on his research project. He maintains a schedule, where he doesn't ordinarily work on weekends, spending it with friends or family. Recently, Alex began to devote time at work to consider his career choices and to explore various career paths. As a result, his research progress slowed. When Dr. Smith schedules a meeting to review his productivity, she discovers that Alex has been focusing on career exploration. She tells Alex he should prioritize his established research goals before spending time on other tasks. After a month, Dr. Smith feels no progress has been made, and emails Alex stating that they are not paying Alex to explore his career options while his current research is at a standstill. Alex concludes that Dr. Smith is ignoring the guidance she gives her trainees regarding work-life balance and careers. When Dr. Smith copies all members of the lab on her email, Alex feels humiliated for being publicly reprimanded and becomes upset that the expectations previously discussed were now null and void. Alex approaches Dr. Smith to discuss his professional development and work-life balance, but she shuts down the conversation, stating that there are many students who put in more effort.

Discussion guide:

1. What are your thoughts about Alex's experience? What actions would you recommend to address Alex's concerns?
2. If you were on the email list and saw Dr. Smith's email, how would you feel and what actions would you take, if any?

Mentor perspective (Dr. Smith): Dr. Smith accepts a PhD student named Alex into the lab. Alex comes highly recommended with an impressive track record demonstrating hard-work, dedication, and commitment to research. Dr. Smith is pleased with Alex's progress, and is eager to see Alex's work developed and published - both because it will help him fulfill his training milestones, and because she is under pressure to show progress on the research grant that supports him. Recently, Dr. Smith has begun to feel that Alex has not been productive, and subsequently discovers that he has been spending time on career exploration. If Alex needs to spend time on career exploration, Dr. Smith wants him to do this alongside his research work by utilizing weekends. Dr. Smith knows that putting in weekend hours is part of "the job" and that this is the key to professional success in biomedical research. She emails Alex and the other lab members about her expectations. Dr. Smith feels it is important and helpful for a mentor to push students to reach their full potential.

Discussion guide:

1. What are your thoughts about this situation after hearing Dr. Smith's side?
2. If you were Dr. Smith, how would you feel if you were approached with Alex's concern?
3. Have your opinions about handling the situation changed since hearing the mentor's perspective? If so, how?

What do you think could be done in the short term to resolve the immediate tension and what would have to change in order to strengthen the long-term working relationship between Alex and Dr. Smith?

Return to main room before proceeding below

Discussion Guide

Some discussion points for one-on-one conversations between participants and mentors

- Mentors: share your priorities: e.g. how do you recharge your batteries outside of work, what career choices did you consider, what are your values
- Mentees: share priorities in your career search – work-life balance, career choices, values
- Together, identify students' skills and competencies that may shape career options
- Identify mutual expectations regarding
 - a. time on work in lab and career planning activities
 - b. guidance for career planning
 - c. activities to gain relevant experience
- Discuss expectations, awareness of importance regarding promoting networking opportunities (e.g. at conferences, introductions to contacts)
- Identify communication styles and effective methods of communication that work for you (student-mentor pair)