2021 PhD Student Orientation

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Welcome to CS Stanford

- The department stands on three pillars, students are one (together with faculty & staff).
  - The department is yours just as much as ours.

- Each one of you is here for a good reason.
  - We are looking forward to working with you.
  - Your success is also our success.
  - We are here to support you.

- You are shareholders, workers and customers of the department
  - Protections and resources of a workplace.
Welcome to Wonderland

• **Wonderous**: a playground of knowledge and ideas; a lot of freedom; brilliant colleagues (junior and senior).
  • Enjoy it (nothing to wait for).
• **Baffling**: a lot that is new and different
  • Basic orientation.
  • A lot to learn about research and about yourself – give yourself time.
  • Uncertainty is inherent part of research. Embrace it, be playful (an adventure).
  • Rely on others.
A Crucial Partnership

- **A student adviser relationship**: often the most impactful relationship in a student’s career.
  - Many different styles.
  - When it works it’s great.
  - When it doesn’t it could be a real problem for both student and adviser (rare but a concern).

- **Your one job for year 1**: align with an adviser.
  - May not be the one you thought you would.
  - Hence - **rotations**
  - Rotations allow students and faculty to get to know each other (real improvement)
  - Allow students to re-evaluate their interests.
Rotations

• Students drive the process
  • You approach faculty, ask to rotate
  • Plan ahead!

• It’s a market:
  • Students evaluate faculty during rotations.
  • Faculty evaluate students during rotations.
  • Some students (and faculty) are more popular.
  • Not everyone get their first choice (students or faculty).
    • Sometimes works better.

• Works the best if you are not set on a particular adviser.
Alignments

- **Things to think about:**
  - Research interests: faculty will spend more time on projects they are excited about
  - Compatible style: do you enjoy talking with them?
  - Hands-on vs. hands-off.
  - How much time do they spend with students?

- **Talk to their existing students:**
  - How often do you meet with the adviser? For how long?
  - Greatest strengths and weaknesses?

- **Talk to senior students:**
  - What do you know now that you wish you’d known during your first year?

- **It’s worth extra work:** know what you are getting yourself into.
Rotation Tips

• Rotate only with faculty you can potentially align with, until you have at least one firm offer that you are happy with.

• Ask beforehand:
  • “How many new students do you expect to take this year?”
  • “How many students will be rotating with you?”
  • “How many of your slots have you already committed?”
  • “What are your expectations during the rotation?”

• Ask afterwards:
  • “How did I do? What parts were you least happy with?”
  • “Are you prepared to offer me an RAship now? If not, when will you make the decision, and how will you make it?”
  • An evasive or heavily qualified answer probably means “no.”
Rotation Tips II

• Take rotations seriously:
  • Easy on the classes.
  • Careful with rotations leaking into each other.

• Take initiative, be active, get involved:
  • Do something concrete (don’t be picky).
  • Work with other students.
  • Learn from senior student.

• Be realistic:
  • Probably can’t write a paper in a quarter, may never lead to publication.
  • Learn about an area, a faculty, and a style of doing research.
  • Research experience.
  • Make connections with other students and faculty.
Parting Thoughts

Psychology is a lot of what it is about.

- Not waste time evaluating yourself.
- Research is a job - no Einsteins.
- Compete only as needed, collaborate often.
- You are the CEOs of your enterprises.

Not a sprint. Take your time to

- Learn this profession, learn yourself.
- Go deep, to think and play, to specialize.
- Enjoy research.
- Enjoy life (socialize, exercise, expand).