

CSC 595 - Research Skills

People Skills and Managing Your Advisor

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Nick Feamster and Alex Gray: <https://noise-lab.net/research-course/>

Personal Promotion



The Market

- You are a walking, talking version of a startup company that is “selling”:
 - Techniques, results, datasets (note: datasets not literally for sale please...)
 - Yourself (reputation, problem solving ability)
- Goal: Getting high-quality buyers

Find a Good Buyer's Market

- Buyer's market: a market where buyer's have the advantage (lots for sale)
 - Sellers must be strategic to compete in the marketplace
- How to position yourself for a good buyer's market?
 - Identify a niche to fit into (related to skills/techniques, not research area) that also allows you to adapt as market demand (demand for certain topics) changes
 - Example: don't just learn how to use a tool, learn the ideas *behind* the tool
 - In a sense, getting a job really means making people want to buy YOU

Make Your Product Attractive

- What is your product?
 - Your research, your techniques, your style of thinking, how you can help clarify someone else's thinking (being a good sounding board)
- If you give great talks, that is your product too
 - Talks where people learn something
 - Talks where people start to reflect
 - Leads to being an invited speaker (even students can be invited)

Develop your Brand

- People want to assign labels to everything. They like simplicity
 - So choose your label for them
 - Your label may be associated with the problems you can solve or the people that come to you to solve their problems. What problems/people would you like those to be?
- How can people outside your area easily identify what you are known for?

Develop your Brand

- HCI: “original cyborg”
- Theory: “kidney exchange person”
- HCI/Linguistics/AI: “decoding dolphin speech person”
- Theory: “black-box reductions person”



Advertising



Advertising

- Why advertise?
 - People have limited attention span
 - People have limited time
 - How to get them to notice your cool results (the results you truly think the world needs)?

Advertising

- Spend a limited amount of *your own* time advertising your “products” (results)
 - Giving talks
 - Spreading the word at conferences
 - Your personal web page
 - Social media

Advertising

- Spend a *lot* of time working on *producing* great results. Best advertising is from:
 - getting awards (hard work leads to *others* advertising for you)
 - doing work with public appeal that gets picked up by popular press

Personal Website

- If you don't have a personal website yet, then do you really exist?
- How to design a good personal website?
- Make it *easy* - easy to find info people frequently look for
 - Your face (if you're ok with posting it), so people can find you at a conference
 - Your papers
 - Your email address
 - Your CV
 - And update it frequently!



Personal Website



- If you don't have a personal website yet, then do you really exist?
- How to design a good personal website?
- Make it *interesting*
 - Why? So people remember you
 - Examples: fun photos, recipes, music
 - Papers - make it interesting! liner notes, descriptive graphic, one sentence on “cool thing in the paper”

Don't Fade Out of Existence!

- Implicit ways to remind people you exist
 - Email a colleague if they have a paper you like (you praise them, and they remember you!)
- Explicit reminders that are not just advertisements
 - If you have a recent paper or result you really think is great:
 - Write pedagogical blog post about it
 - Write social media thread about it (X/Twitter/etc.)
 - Stuck on a problem? Post about it on social media

Managing Your Advisor

Advisor

YOUR ~~THESIS COMMITTEE~~

Also known as: an impossibly difficult group to get together in one room but who nevertheless hold your future in their hands depending on their ability to reach a civilized consensus.



Your Professor

Simultaneously your biggest ally and your worst enemy. Will be the first to suggest you do more work.



The Guru

Only here for the free cookies. Don't forget to bring cookies.



The Adversary

Has bitter rivalry with your Professor and will argue the exact opposite view. Work this to your advantage.



The Strawman/woman

Nice guy. No opinions.



The Assistant Professor

Still doesn't believe just a few months ago they were on the other side just like you. Pretends to be an adult.

NONE OF THEM WILL ACTUALLY READ YOUR ENTIRE THESIS.

These styles may also capture your advisor at different points in time!

You and Your Advisor

- Ideally, your advisor:
 - Feeds you with funding
 - Feeds you with good problems to work on
 - Guides you along the way to a good solution
 - Teaches you all the unwritten skills of research, explicitly or implicitly, including writing, speaking, reviewing, grant-writing, etc
 - Promotes you, internally and externally, for fellowships, jobs, committees, etc

You and Your Advisor

- Your advisor is:
 - Overloaded
 - Ultimately an intellectual, and excited by ideas
- Your advisor is happy if:
 - You save him or her time
 - You don't create last-minute emergencies
 - You understand the high-level goals, and come up with things he/she didn't think of
 - You learn on your own, and teach him/her
 - You don't give up instantly

Advisor Styles

- Type of feedback:
 - Explicit vs Implicit
- Type of guidance:
 - Heavy guidance versus giving near-complete independence
 - When is each style the best for you to get stronger?

On Independence

- Early on, ok to be an apprentice
 - If your advisor has time, do research together
- Pretty soon, seek independence
 - Some advisors are “hands-on”. Make you are doing “heavy lifting” too. Why?
- Independence can lead to disagreement
 - Criticism of ideas is OK. Keep trying. Figure out the *why* behind the criticism. Understand advisor’s style
 - Criticism of “style of thinking” is *sometimes* justified (reflect on your own “algorithm”)

Work style

- Giving heavy guidance versus near-complete independence
 - When is each style the best for you to get stronger?

Work style

- Meeting frequency
 - Do meetings seem too often for you? Are there hidden benefits?
 - Do meetings seem to infrequent for you?
 - If it's a serious issue, bring it up with advisor
 - If it isn't a serious issue, how can you use this to your advantage?

Goals

- Your Goals versus Advisor's Goals
 - Hopefully aligned, but not always!