

JOB OUTLOOKS FROM THE SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY

GRADUATE JOURNAL: PHD LIMITATIONS

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When I decided to pursue a PhD, I thought the long road to this short acronym would pay off with respect (mainly from people outside academia), more job opportunities and better pay, in academia and industry.

But I've now realized there are no guarantees - especially in 'nontraditional' jobs outside research. Recently I was talking to someone who had just gained her PhD and was trying hard to find a job in pharmaceutical marketing. She has discovered that people with doctorates are not readily hired in that field, as they are considered too expensive and overqualified. But one of my fellow students who left university after his master's degree has got the sort of job she was seeking, in a leading pharmaceutical company.

A PhD reflects specialization in a research area and therefore imposes certain limits on future job choices. Looking for a research position is usually a matter of availability and complementary research goals, but diving into non-research subjects can be difficult and sometimes requires additional skills. Thinking about this earlier, rather than later, in your career can save you time. I plan to use these conversations to see where I want to go and what skills I need to get there - before I complete my PhD.

Recruiters & Industry

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GRACE WONG

Grace Wong is founder and chief scientific officer of ActoKine Therapeutics and founder of Student Vision.

Get a foot in the door

There is no magic trick for landing a good job in science. But if you produce good research or file useful patents, you can take a few steps to plant the seeds of opportunity.

Network. Introductions from friends, mentors and collaborators are especially valuable. When you come in contact with people who teach you and share ideas, do reciprocate. Show a sincere interest in their achievements and help them during difficult times.

Follow up. Collecting business cards is even more important than giving out yours. Maintain close contacts with mentors and friends, not just when you need a job. E-mail your CV directly to scientists, who

will notice your attributes more than administrators. If you cannot meet the speakers from conferences, search for their e-mail addresses and ask for slides.

Volunteer. To build new skills and contacts, spend some time in a different lab. Volunteering at commercial conferences can get you a free pass to attend seminars and meet speakers. Organizing seminars and panel discussions for local societies is also a good way to meet scientists.

Be industrious. Even if you are based in academia, collaborate with industry-based scientists. They could provide unique reagents or helpful recommendations. One may even become your future boss. Consider a temporary industry job or a postdoc. You will gain valuable perspective on industry, and may get hired permanently.

Meet people. Attend free seminars at small academic symposia to meet scientists and catch up on hot technologies. Talk to vendors at trade shows. Ask them which companies are hiring and what technologies are hot. Use your first meeting to establish rapport: talk about science or shared interests rather than jobs.

Prepare. Have a short, memorable 'smart pitch' ready to market your scientific background and accomplishments in simple terms a broad audience can understand, and in less than a minute. Also tailor your resumé or CV to match a company's needs or its job descriptions. If possible, send it directly to a scientist you've met in the company - it's much more likely to be read.

Above all, remember that all interactions are potentially important. Be cheerful, kind and helpful to everyone, not only managers! Show a passion for science. Plant many seeds, learn, become wiser today than yesterday and create more options. A positive-minded problem-solver with creative ideas, talents or expertise will be welcome at any door.