Abstracting your skills from your workplace: defining your skills to non-academic employers

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Via videoconference to the University of Connecticut

Today's goal

At the end of this session, you should understand what it means to abstract your skills from their current academic implementation, why you need to do that, and how to do so, critical prerequisites for the non-academic job-search.

Today's process

- We have forty-five minutes, which includes time for questions. Don't be shy.

- Feel free to take notes via phone photos and tweet or post about the session

- A PDF of the slides and a recording of this session will be posted for your review

Agenda

Academic and non-academic work terms (sl. 5-7)

What employers need (sl. 8-9)

Abstracting your skills from your current job (sl. 10-14)

How to put a skills list together (sl. 15)

What to do with the list (sl. 16)

Optimism (sl. 17)

Resources (sl. 18)

Academic work terms

- Research
- Publications (articles, monographs, notes, literature reviews)
- Conference presentations and posters
- Teaching (classes, seminars, office hours, labs)
- Service work (hiring, evaluating, reviewing grant applications, administrating, organizing conferences, etc.)

These terms describe work done in the particular environment of academics

Non-academic work terms

- Product delivery
- Project delivery
- Service delivery
- Customer engagement
- Communication
- Budget ownership
- Staff management
- Schedule management

These terms describe work done in non-academic workplaces

Academic vs. non-academic work terms

Lab project

- Defining a problem
- Designing an experiment
- Writing a grant proposal
- Creating a budget
- Defining a team
- Training the team
- Supervising the team
- Writing up results
- Presenting results (conference)
- Publishing results

Corporate product development

- Defining a customer need
- Proposing solutions
- Finding support
- Creating a project plan
- Defining a team
- Training the team
- Supervising the team
- Reviewing results
- Presenting results to internal business owners
- Possibly publishing results

What I need when I hire someone

- people with skills, which may or may not be gained via their graduate work. Most jobs do not require a specific credential, such as a Ph.D.; all jobs require skills
- people who can show me how what they can do is relevant to what I need done
- people who are willing and able to take on new things

Job candidates must show me how their skills can help solve my challenges

What I don't do when I hire someone

- I have never hired "someone with X degree," ever

Bridging work terms

- Academic and non-academic workplaces do most of the same things, but describe them differently
- Academic and non-academic workplaces use most of the same skills, but deploy them in different ways
- You must show employers what your skills are in language that makes sense in their workplace context
- To do that, you must abstract your skills from their current workplace context of academics

Abstract skills from academic context

- Change your conception of graduate student as who you are to graduate school as what you do
- List what you do in graduate school
- Identify the skills decontextualized from the academic environment

Once you have done this, you can them match your skills to an employer's needs

Graduate *student* as identity

- Grad students often describe themselves like this:
  - I am a grad student / postdoc in [field and subject] with an expertise in [topic]
  - I am an experienced researcher, experienced with [field methods and research techniques]
  - I am a scholar, having presented [this] and published [this]
  - I am in training to become a PI / faculty member

*Frequent internalization: "this is who I **am**": they define themselves by their particular environment*

Graduate *school* as job

- Things you do in graduate school:
  - Coursework
  - Write papers and do research projects
  - Sit candidacy exams to advance to the dissertation
  - Propose, research, write, and defend a dissertation
  - Present your work to your department and at conferences
  - Teach

Better internalization: "this is what I <u>do</u>" here in graduate school

What you do, decontextualized

- Coursework: I learn large bodies of knowledge quickly, and refine the knowledge to current standard
- Papers and research projects: I complete large projects with minimal supervision
- Candidacy exams: I demonstrate subject mastery sufficient to allow me to propose and complete original independent work
- Dissertation proposal: I use research and analytical abilities to identify problems and propose solutions
- Dissertation defense: I discuss my work before expert audiences and defend my approach and my conclusions
- Teaching: I manage contentious discussions toward productive conclusions
- Teaching: I persuade reluctant adopters to accept and deploy standards
- Lead TA / RA: I have participated in / led small teams within the enterprise

How to put a skills list together

- Write down what you have done in graduate school
- Define it in terms apart from your academic context
- Describe what you do in graduate school, and ask someone in a non-academic job to tell you what you are doing
- Ask people in non-academic workplaces to help you look for similarities in the kinds of things you and they do

What to do with the list

- Do the same exercise for other jobs you have held
- Combine the lists, and sort and count the skills you have
- Note which ones you have used most
- Read lots of non-academic job descriptions to learn their workplace jargon (ask friends with non-academic jobs to help you translate)
- Go back and refine your skill list to use the terms non-academic employers use for those skills

Optimism

- Grad school focuses on a narrow range of jobs, but there are many interesting, challenging, great jobs outside academics
- Jobs are changing rapidly, and employees who can learn a lot quickly, which grad students know how to do, will do well
- Some jobs you will hold may not exist now
- Some organizations you work for may not exist now

Resources at www.annekrook.com

- What I sometimes miss when I interview people with a PhD for non-ac jobs: http://annekrook.com/?page_id=877
- Your core message to a non-academic employer: http://annekrook.com/?page_id=1359
- They're not transferable skills; they're just skills: http://annekrook.com/?page_id=1443
- Describing your skills in a non-ac job letter: http://annekrook.com/?page_id=729
- Don't use these phrases in your non-ac job letter: http://annekrook.com/?page_id=812

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