

How to land your dream job: Career development tips for students and trainees

Nicola Paine, PhD (Concordia University)
Amanda Rossi, PhD (McGill University)



Plan for today's workshop

1) Skills

- what you have, what you need and how you're going to improve those

2) Careers in non-Academic setting

- what your options are

3) Careers in Academia

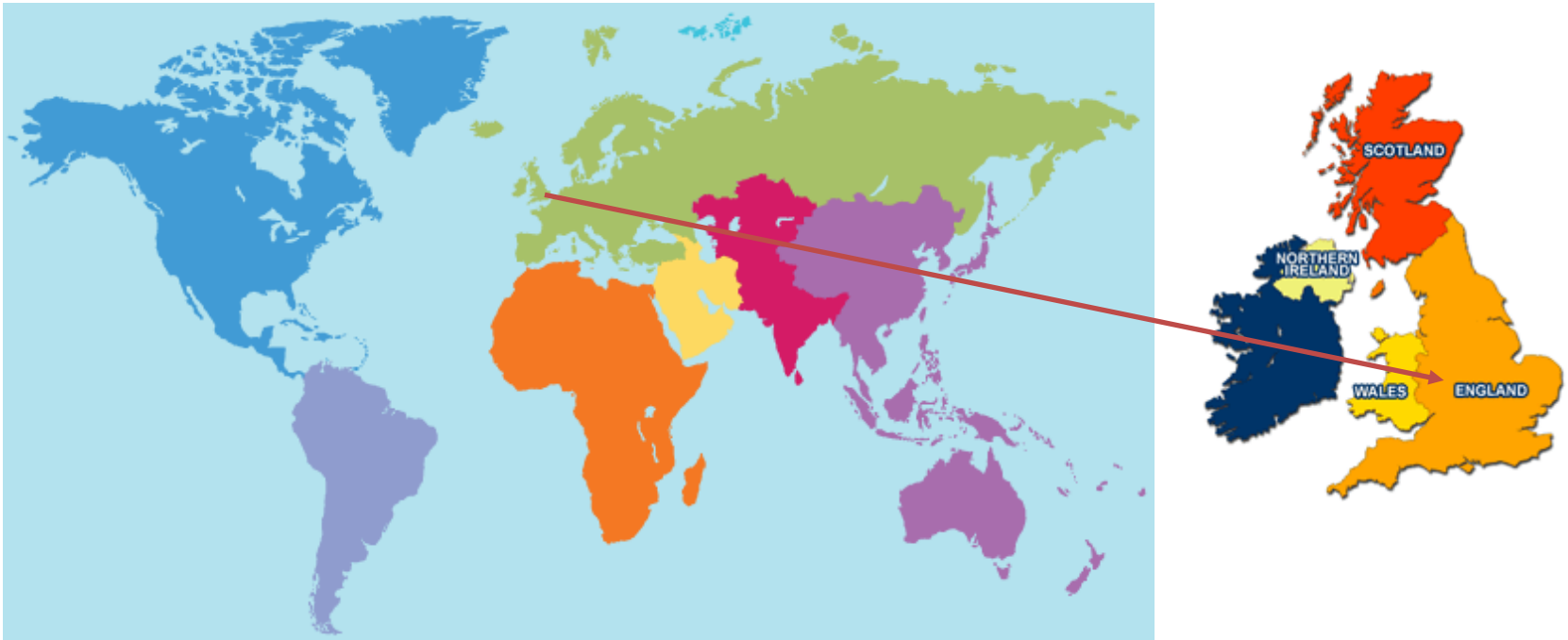
- funding, selection of training (graduate and postdoc)



Nicola Paine

ibtn
international
behavioural
trials network

- Exercise Science and Behavioural Medicine



Nicola Paine

- Sport and Exercise Science
- BSc (06-09)
- PhD (09-13)



Nicola Paine

- Post-doc – Duke University, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioural Science



Nicola Paine

- Post-doc – Concordia University
- FRQS funding (2014-present)
- CIHR funding (2016-2018)



Amanda Rossi

ibtn
international
behavioural
trials network

- BS
- U
- PH
- So

dia



Amanda Rossi

- McGill University
- Research Institute of the McGill University Health Centre



What are our areas of research?

- The elevator pitch
- 30 seconds to 1 minute to introduce yourself
- Who you are
- What you do (simple and specific terms)



“Hi, I’m Amanda Rossi. I’m a post-doctoral fellow at the Research Institute of the McGill University Health Centre. My research is focused on women’s heart health and how different phases of a woman’s life, such as pregnancy and menopause, can impact heart disease.”



“Hi, I’m Nicola Paine. I’m a post-doc at Concordia, and I study how health behaviours such as physical activity, diet, exercise and even things like being depressed or anxious can impact on diseases such as heart and lung disease”



“Hi, I’m Nicola Paine. I’m a post-doc at Concordia, and I’m investigating how the interactions between health behaviours and inflammation can influence endothelial dysfunction, vascular reactivity and myocardial ischemia”



Your elevator pitch

- Spend a few moments, planning your elevator pitch
- Introduce yourself to the group
 - Remember that some members may not understand very technical language!
- This skill is key to networking!



Your career path

- What is your current position or level of study?
- At this moment, what is your ideal job?
- What do you think you have to do to get there?



How to land your dream job?

- Skills and characteristics
- Experience
- History or proof of certain achievements/traits
 - PhD/qualifications
 - Publications
 - Funding



Strengths

- What are your strengths?
 - Skill-based; inter-personal skills



Weaknesses

- What are your weaknesses?
 - Skill-based; inter-personal skills



What would you like to improve or develop?

- How will you do this?



Key skills needed

- Soft-skills
 - Time management
 - Organization
 - Maturity – scientific
 - Presentation
 - Writing skills
 - Papers
 - Grants/applications
 - Student supervision
 - Imposter syndrome
- Hard-skills
 - Key skills specific to your research
 - Technical skills
 - Data interpretation
 - Statistics
 - Writing skills
 - Papers
 - Grants/applications
 - Student supervision



Survival Skills

- Managing yourself
- Managing your supervisor
- Learning to say no



Managing your supervisor

- **Interpersonal: Set some ground rules**
 - **Expectations, regular meetings**
- **Learning: ask the right question**
 - **Ask for advice and guidance about next steps**
 - **Asking for help is not a weakness, it is a strength**
- **Institutional: don't sit and suffer**
 - **Many resources available**



Networking

- Key to finding opportunities!
- Internal workshops and competitions – huge opportunities
- Conferences – use of social media
- Important in non-academic settings



ANY QUESTIONS?



How to land your dream job: Career development tips for students and trainees

Nicola Paine, PhD (Concordia University)
Amanda Rossi, PhD (McGill University)



Typical Careers in Academia

- Lecturers / Professors / Researchers
 - Tenured vs Non-Tenured
 - Assistant vs Associate vs Full (North America)
 - Regular vs Senior vs Full (European)
- Teaching only positions
 - No research time, sole focus on teaching



Professor positions

- Experience
 - Post-doctoral experience of at least 2-3 years
- Publications
 - Amount needed will vary based on competition, position, and other qualities
- Funding



The F-word

- Funding is critical to obtaining your dream job
 - Scholarships/Fellowships
 - Travel awards
 - Grants
 - Seed-money, internal competitions, small-ish amounts
 - Agency funding, foundations/societies, industry
- Biggest predictor of future funding success is...



Where to look for funding

- National agencies – CIHR, NSERC, SSHRC
- Provincial agencies – Quebec (FRQ-S)
- Pick the most appropriate organisation for your work
- Know when the deadlines are!



Where to look for funding

- Foundations and societies
 - Heart and Stroke Foundation (provincial)
 - Canadian Lung Association
 - Canadian Cancer Society
 - Canadian Dermatology Association

- Support scholarships and grants



Where to look for funding

- Industry
 - BI, AZ, Johnson & Johnson, GSK ...
- Typically fund research studies rather than personal funding
- Mitacs



Where to look for funding

- Internal awards
 - Travel awards (department, faculty, grad studies)
 - Scholarships – aim of these is to make you more competitive for external awards
 - Seed money – starting a position
- All awards, no matter how big, are important!



How to write a good funding application

- Read the instructions carefully!
- Follow the rules and check eligibility – stick to word limits



How to write a good funding application

- Keep CVs etc up to date!
- Start the application early
 - Reference letters are often needed; some applications still need to be mailed in
 - Transcripts
- Pick your referees carefully – often previous supervisor is requested.
 - Ask them as soon as possible if they are happy to be a referee
 - Ask them for a POSITIVE reference



Sell your project

- Make sure your project is clear, concise, and detailed.
- Check what to include: introduction, hypothesis, methodology, expected results how and why your work will be innovative and unique.
- What gap in the literature will your research fill? Why is it important?



Sell yourself!

- Why are you the best candidate to carry it out?
 - Past research successes, special knowledge, research training you have done, and so on.
 - Be obnoxious when writing your drafts



What to include

- Personal funding applications: focus on the candidate rather than the project *per se*
- Important to mention:
 - Past academic work,
 - Academic awards won,
 - Publications, conference presentations
- Be specific: how do you/your supervisor match up to the opportunity
- Check previous applications for advice – yours and other peoples!



Laying out your project

- Layout is key!
 - Reviewers often have about 10 applications to review
 - Each one takes about 30-45 minutes
 - Peer review is in addition to regular job – it's voluntary
 - Leave lots of spaces – don't fill the page with text



Picking your supervisor/lab

- Important at graduate and post-doctoral level
- Tricky, and no fool proof method
- Typically interviewed, with a lab visit
 - Often interviewed online for international positions



Picking your supervisor/lab

- Ask the right questions
 - How many students do you have?
 - How many students have you graduated?
 - How many students have you NOT graduated?
 - What do you expect from students you supervise?
 - How does your research fit your supervisors?
 - Ask other grad students in the lab of their experiences



Picking your supervisor/lab

- Critical that the fit between student and supervisor is right
- You will spend a lot of time together!
- You can say no!
 - If it doesn't feel right, don't feel pressured to accept position



The perils of picking “a big name” for a supervisor

- They may have less time than other smaller names
 - Could be Professor ‘No-Show’
 - May ask you to help them with their jobs (marking, supervising more junior students)
- However, they will have excellent contacts
 - Great for networking, future job prospects



Working abroad

- Opportunities to study abroad/work in another lab
 - External funding available for these specific opportunities
- Excellent on CV – different cultures, different experience
- Broadens research network



Non-Academic Careers

- Did you know...
 - Only \pm 30% of PhDs wind up in academic careers
 - Average age of postdoc: 34 years old
 - Average salary of postdoc: <45,000 CAD
 - No benefits
 - 50 % more people with PhDs than in 2001 (Canada)

What screws us up the most in life is the picture in our head of what it's supposed to be.
– Socrates

Non-Academic Careers

- Industry/Business
- Freelance/Entrepreneur
- Government/Non-profit
 - Healthcare
- Higher Education



When/Where/How to start planning?

- When: NOW!
- Where: EVERYWHERE!
- How: NETWORK!



What...

To do...

- Networking
- LinkedIn
- CV (not a research CV)
- Learn to articulate your skills
- Informational interviews

No to do...

- Assume the employer cares about or emphasizes the lab/research skill you've acquired- you are more than a lab rat!
- Assume your first job will be your forever job



Nicola Paine: nicola.paine@mbmc-cmcm.ca

Amanda Rossi: amanda.rossi@clinepi.mcgill.ca

ANY QUESTIONS

