Sojourner and Apprentice: Graduate student Experience in Agriculture and Life Sciences

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Community of Practice (CoP)

Understanding the experience of Graduate Students through the lens of Landscapes of Practice: Sojourner in a Community of Practice

Identity & Knowledgeability

- Movement between Workplace and Academic Communities
  - Face Challenges
  - Resiliency
  - Translate Learning

- Challenge: Navigating Multiple Boundaries
  - Academic & Workplace
  - Current & Future Work Roles
  - Discipline/Area of Practice
Legitimate Peripheral Participation

- Ways that Novices Learn through Participation within CoP
- Imagined Trajectory:
  - Individual Trajectories - across multiple CoP’s across Landscape in Higher Education
  - Encountering Boundaries
  - Periphery to Center ---- Other Trajectories to Consider within Landscape

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participation</th>
<th>Imagined Trajectory</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Inside CoP</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Marginal</td>
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<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>Apprentice</td>
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Graduate Student Responses

Open Ended Survey: Pilot Data
Community of Practice:

• CoP Defined
• Community of Practice: Benefits of Membership
• Barrier to Participation: Time/Workload Balance/Space

Description of Community:

• Community: Perception/Recognition
• Community: Inclusive Environments
• Faculty Role in Community
Describing Graduate Student Experience:

• Relationship: Faculty & Graduate Student
• University Support/Resource: Seldom Recognized
• Academic Bullying: Subtle Signs
• Imposter Syndrome: Recognized & Unseen
• Mentorship: Description/Impact
• Navigating Departmental Tensions
• Part-time Students: Support Needs
• International Students: Cultural Needs
Defining Community of Practice

It means we all share the same values, culture, sense of belonging, relationship, respect one another, collaborate, be present.

For me, being a member of a community of practice means playing a role as a part of that community. It involves being encouraging of others towards the same goals, and not tearing them down. It also includes accepting the identities of others, even if they are not immediately visible identities. Being a member of a community of practice does not mean going to every community event just to say you did, but being authentic and fully present at the events that you can attend, and trying to be there for others when they need you. We have to cheer each other on so we can accomplish great things.

As a member of a community of practice, I expect to share ideas and learn from others in a supportive environment where experiences can occur. Competitions are at a minimal because the goal in a community of practice is to grow individually and that one success is all of our success.
Barriers to Participation

- Time
- Background - Culture, Experiences, Work, Education
- Part-time Students
- Heavy Workload
- Family Obligations
- Personality
- Navigating Relationships
- Office Environment
- Academic Bullying
- Imposter Syndrome
- Proximity to Campus
Strategies for Building Community
Strategies for Building Community

• Refrain from making assumptions about graduate student participation/involvement.
  “As someone substantially older than my graduate school peers, with much more life experience behind me, it is difficult for me to engage and relate with them. [As] an older graduate student, participating in the much younger graduate student community would feel so out of place like the old person you see on tv that is 80 and going back to high school”

• Get to know the Graduate Students
  • Commute
  • Family
  • Culture
  • History
  “We used to have happy hours and faculty members used to participate, but of recent in many occasions very few faculty show up. These platforms help to break the barriers and know each other”
Strategies for Building Community

- Create inviting office space for Graduate Students
  - Idea generating space
  - Social space and presence in department as professionals
- Open door policy with faculty and administrators
- Open department meetings to Graduate Student attendance
- Open postings of opportunities: research, projects, teaching

“Friendliness, I know I could literally walk into any faculty office to ask for help. Open door policy. Faculty (and students) posting opportunities on grad student listserv. Open departmental meetings”

“Office comradery! I have been able on multiple occasions to chat with my office mates to explore class topics and ideas on a deeper level. That is the experience that demonstrated the purpose and goal of academia”
Strategies for Building Community

- Departmental trainings: Faculty, Administrator, and Graduate Student trainings/sessions on topics of need.
  - Inclusive practices
  - Mentorship relationships- Mentor and Mentee

[department] is a wonderful department, is a diverse department but I think some people don’t know how to deal with diversity...asking appropriate questions...there is a need for the department to receive...training from the graduate school so that faculty and students become aware...of how they affect others.”
Strategies for Building Community

- Graduate Program Director:
  - Communicator
  - Advocate
  - Support/Resource point person

I felt like I got to see some issues in the department...the graduate director was happy to meet in other locations, like coffee shops...the department graduate director and the graduates school ombudsman were very good in helping me to negotiate my way through and to resolve the situation. I am very glad that this support system is there, and I have a first-hand appreciation for why it is needed. Because of this support system, I feel optimistic that students can push past barriers.”
Thank You!

Share some other best practices/strategies to support the Graduate Student experience.