Panel Discussion:
Navigating Career Transitions in Addiction Research & Clinical Practice

Moderator: Julie Cristello, MS
Panelists: David Eddie, PhD; Noah Emery, PhD; Neo Gebru, MPS, Laura Lesnewich, MS; Dezarie Moskal, MS

<u>Graduate Students</u>

1. How challenging is it for graduate students to manage multiple responsibilities (e.g., coursework, lab tasks, research, clinical work, writing). Any advice for incoming grad students?

<u>Neo</u>: Managing multiple responsibilities can be very challenging. It is important to realize that grad students (and faculty) wear several hats (e.g., student/teacher, mentee/mentor, therapist, researcher, etc). Even with just one of those positions, say, researcher, there are so many aspects involved – research methodology, writing, stats, etc.

First, do not put unreasonable expectations on yourself and give in to the beliefs that you have to be excellent at every single one of those roles <u>all of the time</u>. As you progress throughout your studies and indeed, your career, you will find which roles and which skills come more naturally to you. Listen to your gut – identify skills you want to learn, engage in deliberate practice, and hone those skills.

I would also advise incoming grad students to learn and broaden your time horizon. It is unlikely that you'll be thrown into all of those roles, and be expected to be excellent at them, from day one. In fact, while we may want to be productive and do everything we can each day, that's simply impossible. If a grant is due soon, that will take priority. If course finals are coming up, focus on your studies. If you have a difficult client, spend some time thinking about that. But it is unlikely that you need to do these at the same time, all of the time. Expand your time horizon of your to-do list from daily to maybe weekly. You don't have to do all of these things every single day. Maybe a few times a week is ok. Ensuring that you set reasonable expectations of success removes the feeling of inadequacy and unproductivity some may feel, which will free you up to do

your best work. Accept that your priorities will change over time and be ready for the adventure. It's very exciting that we get to try things out and figure what we want to do. What we choose our lives caring about. Enjoy this time to experiment with different roles and learn new skills. The rest will figure itself out. Importantly, if you feel overwhelmed or unsure of how well you're doing, ask peers in the same year and above as well as your mentor for feedback. They have probably thought about these things before, and they can share their experiences.

Laura: I would say this is one of, if not *the*, most challenging aspects of graduate school. Coming into grad school, we all know how to be a good student, and some of us even know a little bit about what it means to be a good researcher, clinician, and/or teacher. Learning how to balance all of these roles and switch between them (oftentimes within the same day...or hour!) is the hard part. I wish I could offer a fool-proof method, but alas, I believe the most effective method is unique to each individual. As a fifth-year PhD student getting ready to leave for clinical internship, I am still figuring this out, but here are some strategies I have found to be helpful.

First, prioritize. Finding yourself bogged down in irrelevant classwork? It's totally okay to do the bare minimum. Clinical work not your jam? Look for practicum opportunities with fewer hour demands. Discovering research isn't really for you after all? It's okay to turn down extra projects— but keep working toward those milestones! Second, try to configure a block schedule that minimizes role-switching as much as possible, especially if those switches involve travel. This is easier said than done but can be a huge time-saver. Your ability to do this may vary by semester, which is okay! A related tip is to try and take advantage of ebbs in the academic calendar (e.g., summer) to catch up on research and writing. Third, communicate early and often with mentors and supervisors to manage their expectations. Grad school will teach you to become your own best advocate. Fourth, stimulus control—it really works! This principle of behavior change is simple, yet powerful. Try designating distinct work environments for different tasks (e.g., coffee shop + headphones = writing mode, office desk = stats mode, library + tea = homework mode). Last, set reasonable boundaries to make time for fun (and only fun). Case and point: you'll never find me watching a movie and doing work at the same time. Remember: all work and no play makes Jack the grad student a dull (and burnt-out) boy!

Dezarie: It can definitely be a challenge, especially early on in the program. My advice is to discuss with your advisor what your priorities should be given the career path you would like to have. You can then track your time (should you be as driven by the data as I am) and see how well your time is aligning with your priorities. Additionally, I have had great success holding "writing groups" with my peers and highly recommend them. Many responsibilities in graduate school have built in accountability (e.g. clinical work- there is someone in your office). However, ongoing accountability is not always present with writing which tends to be more self-initiated and collaborators/advisors may not be checking in regularly. It gets easier as you go and self care is incredibly important throughout the process!

2. Any tips for staying motivated in an environment that requires high productivity but is very competitive? How do current grad students handle the pressure and maintain self-motivation and confidence?

Neo: Self-care is very important, in grad school, and beyond. Find an activity (or a few) that allow you to disengage from your work. Consider meditation (Headspace app is ~ $10/year for students, and it's well worth the investment), yoga, physical activity, painting, etc. Importantly, I would say to approach your responsibilities with a growth mindset. Grad school will take, on average, 4-6 years. You are not expected to know everything from day 1 – that would defeat the purpose of your training. The first couple of years will be huge learning curves. I heard somewhere that, "anything worth doing is worth doing badly at first." You may be great at some of your responsibilities the first time you try to do them, but you will fail at a lot of things you try the first time you try them. Persist. Being a scientist, researcher, therapist, teacher, and mentor, are all worthy endeavors. But, to quote Coldplay, "nobody said it was easy." Don't be too hard on yourself for not knowing something or messing up. Learn from your mistakes, and don't be afraid to say, "I don't know." To deal with competitiveness, learn to celebrate each other's wins. If colleagues won't engage in that, and even if they do, focus on yourself and your work. You're here to learn, to improve your-self, and to contribute to science. Don't lose that focus. The only one you're in competition with is yourself. Be better than your yesterday. That's all that matters. The rest is just noise.

Laura: I think the best way to deal with a toxic environment is to try to avoid it in the first place. Motivation and confidence always come from within but are either bolstered or hindered by context. I am very thankful to have been "raised" academically in a series of supportive, motivating environments. Luck has no doubt played a role, but I do take some credit for forging this path through the connections I have chosen to make, maintain, and prune throughout my academic career. As graduate students, we are on our way to becoming "high level professionals" (to quote my department chair), and as such we need to take control of our own journey as soon as possible. While it may be easier to sit back and let your mentor lead the way, make the introductions, initiate the collaborations, etc., it is in your best interest to learn to surround *yourself* with people who you know will foster your success. This includes formal and informal mentors, colleagues, and friends. You may not be able to choose all the people you associate with in grad school, but you do have great influence over the quality and depth of these relationships. Nurture supportive connections, and withdraw gracefully from obstructive or destructive relationships. Also, try to maintain close relationships with people outside of the academic world, as difficult as this may get in the weeds of grad school. You'll find that these "outsiders" can provide support in different, refreshing ways, even if it's just enjoying a weekend away where not a single psychology-related conversation arises!

Dezarie: The (likely unsatisfying) short answer: self-care. The more lengthy response: Set goals and check in on the goals daily/weekly. Find others (in or outside of the field) who you can talk to and get a boost from when confidence/motivation is waning. Impostor syndrome is ever present and I have found it helpful to talk with others about my struggles. . . often they are normalized and I feel less defeated. Be kind to yourself. Progress can take time and if you keep chipping away,

you will get where you need to be. Having non-academic activities can help to feel more balanced and prepared for challenges.

3. How would you recommend advocating for things that you need that your program might not offer? For example, certain training experiences or a dataset that you mentor does not have access to.

Neo: I'm a big proponent of asking for what you need. If you don't ask, people simply will not know what you need. If you're wanting to work on a different project than your mentor's, reassure them that you will still meet all of your other responsibilities, and explain why this is an important thing for you to do for your career and training. If you're just wanting to explore new topics, be clear with them about that as well. Most mentors want to prepare you to succeed, so clear communication of goals and career trajectory are important. If they disagree with a certain training, etc, ask them to explain their reasoning, and maybe you can reach a middle ground. Be open to negotiations and come up with win-win scenarios. If you're the one identifying a problem, it's also best to come with proposed solutions.

Laura: I think the key here is to be creative. Both the beauty and the pitfalls of graduate-level education come from it's narrow scope of training. For better or worse, our system for training graduate students does not lend itself easily to acquiring a true breadth of knowledge. That being said, the universities and colleges that house our graduate programs are chock-full of (often) untapped resources for graduate students. Think back to your undergraduate days, when you were bombarded with opportunities to learn outside of your major. These opportunities exist for graduate students as well, but they are often not well-advertised (or, we are too quick to delete those annoying emails and get back to work). Some practical advice: read those annoying emails (at least sometimes); look into courses outside of your department; get announcements from your institution's graduate student council (if there is one) to hear about free colloquia, trainings, etc. across other disciplines; go to conferences where you can meet other researchers who have access to data you want to work with (CPA is great for this!); if there is a common need for additional training (e.g., a specific clinical skill or research method), work with your program director to add it to your curriculum.

Dezarie: This is an important topic! When advocating for your needs, it is most important, first and foremost, to make your needs known. Don't assume others already know. I have been pleasantly surprised at what I was able to get simply by asking. Some potential avenues for advocating within your program are talking to your advisor, your program chair, and/or a student representative if your program has one. You can go outside of your program too and begin to build a professional family which may provide you access to some of these needs (Division 50 provided that for me!). Regarding making the request, do research prior to requesting so that you can make a well formulated pitch. It also helps if you can say how your request will benefit the other person (e.g., if funded to attend a statistical training, offer to present what you learned to the lab or write a paper with the funder using what you learned).:

4. A search of the APPIC directory shows that nearly every site says they provide some training in substance use. Any tips for cutting down the list of potential sites to apply to?

Laura: I agree with Dez! Talking to others in the field, both peers and superiors, can give you a good sense of where to narrow your focus, and SoAP's list of "[Addiction Psychology Opportunities in APA-Accredited Predoctoral Internship Programs](#)" is an excellent resource. I would also add that it is very helpful to look through specific program "brochures" (I put in quotes because this is a misnomer for 20-100+ page PDF documents). Though more time consuming, browsing the brochures, in my experience, gives the best indication of a program's training philosophy (e.g., do they value research training?), specific training opportunities (e.g., full or partial SUD rotations), and strengths/weaknesses. And don't worry...you'll get very good at skimming the documents after the first few.

Dezarie: I found it most helpful to talk to others in the field who had similar interests and inquire about where they applied. You can get some great insight about the sites through conversations with those individuals. Division 50 also compiled a list of addiction-related sites https://addictionpsychology.org/education-training/students-and-early-career

5. When developing a dissertation topic, how do you balance developing a project that you're excited about and contributes new information and feasibility to make sure that you can get it done as a graduate student?

Laura: I think this depends on whether you lie more on the "overly-ambitious" or the "get me out of here" side of the spectrum. For the former case, I like Dez's suggestion to have a candid, unfettered discussion with your advisor and scale back from there. That is exactly what my advisor and I did (over many meetings), and the process yielded a project that I am both passionate about and making progress toward completing within my desired time frame. I will say this: trust when your mentor says something is not feasible. They have considerably more research experience than you and would gladly have you do more if it were possible! For the latter case, I would urge you to remember that there is no quick-and-dirty way to complete a dissertation. You will be spending a lot of time on this project no matter what, so it is worth a small investment of your time to design a project that interests you. In general, making use of existing data is a good strategy. For my project, I collected follow-up data on existing participants to create a longitudinal study that was feasible within a dissertation timeline.

Dezarie: I struggled with this and the feedback I received was "a good dissertation is a finished dissertation." One approach might be to have a brainstorming session, unrestricted, not worried about feasibility. Then from there, begin making tweaks that increase the feasibility. Throughout the process I recommend consulting with an advisor/ someone who has experience to more accurately gauge what might be feasible. You can also read others' dissertations and see the scope of their studies. If you are ultimately unenthusiastic about the topic you choose, I recommend reframing how you think about your project. For instance, consider how it fits within the context of your program of research and your ultimate research goal which may be more

satisfying than a single study. My advisor reminded me, "research is incremental. You cannot achieve all of the answers in one study."

6. For anyone who did not complete their dissertation before going on internship, how did you balance the demands of your internship and getting work done to complete your dissertation?

<u>**Laura**</u>: I have not yet left for internship but am working furiously to finish my dissertation before that time comes (or shortly thereafter). The fact of the matter is, internship is literally a full-time job (40 hours per week if you are lucky). Some programs offer dissertation release time, but this is relatively rare. Many programs that offer protected research time require that your dissertation is complete before you can take advantage of this opportunity. So, my advice to junior students is to plan ahead and aim to complete your program's research and writing requirements before leaving for internship. To my fellow advanced students, I'd say a few long days/weeks now will probably take less of a toll than the same while you are adjusting to a new workplace and, likely, home. In short...keep calm, and finish your diss!

<u>**Dezarie**</u>: I am not yet on internship, but I know people who have been successful in making time for dissertation by incorporating writing groups with others into their schedule.

<u>**Post-Docs/Faculty**</u>

1. What are the steps for a Canadian/international student applying for a postdoc?

<u>**David**</u>: Unfortunately, I can't speak from experience here so have limited contributions to make. Obviously, it's important to check if a post-doc position is open to non-citizens. I'm a US permanent resident but not a citizen, so I can't take any sort of position in the VA system. Most universities do not have such restrictions, but in instances where the fellowship is funded by the US government (e.g., NIH) there may be restrictions.

<u>**Noah**</u>: The answer to this question will vary depending on the site. However, there are some general things to consider when selecting and applying to postdoc positions. While most of the application process will be idiosyncratic to the site, postdocs can be grouped into one of a few clusters based on funding, each with their own requirements for international applicants to consider. In the US, these groups are – NIH funded (e.g., T32 training programs, F32), Veterans Affairs (VA) funded, investigator funded (funded by a grant awarded to the PI), and clinic funded.

Things to consider are:

Does the position have citizenship requirements/restrictions?

VA postdocs have US citizenships requirements making them unavailable to international students. The other types of postdoc are largely open to international students, with some variation. I would check their application materials carefully for this.

What type(s) of accreditation does the postdoc have?

100% research postdocs, such as NIH and investigator funded, often do not have APA or CPA accreditation. However, the rest usually do. This will matter when applying for jobs and/or licensure after your postdoc is over. Thus, if you are planning to return to your country of origin, you should look carefully at their respective requirements to ensure the postdocs you are applying to meet them. If you are planning on staying in the US or Canada, either APA or CPA accreditation should be sufficient. The [First Street Accord](#) (signed in 2017) ensures that APA and CPA accreditation are mutually recognized by the other government and are thus considered interchangeable.

Are they an APPIC member and do they participate in the universal notification date?

This is not specific to international students, but I would be remiss not to reference it. Many postdoc sites are members of the Association of Psychology Postdoctoral and Internship Centers (APPIC). Importantly, APPIC member sites are listed in a [directory](#) where you can find the information to the above questions. APPIC is also moving toward having a unified application portal where you can upload required documents and site-specific application materials in a single place, that then distributes the materials to the sites. All participating sites, then have a universal notification date where you are notified about your standing on the same day so you can make informed decisions about which offer makes the most sense for you. Historically, applicants were notified about whether they got in randomly across several months in early spring and these offers had hard deadlines of only a few weeks. This meant an applicant might have to accept an offer before hearing from another site. Importantly, not all sites participate in the UND. To help with this, APPIC has created a process known as a reciprocal offer. If an applicant hears from a non-participating site before the UND, they can reach out to their top choice and ask them for a reciprocal offer. If the site gives the applicant a reciprocal offer it is considered binding.

2. How long should a post-doc be and what should a student be looking to obtain during a post-doc?

David: Usually 2-3 years for psychologists and neuroscientists, but it varies. I was eager to get through my training so applied for 2 years of support in my F32 rather than 3. In hindsight I wish I'd asked for 3 years of funding as I wasn't able to get a K or R grant right away. That extra year of funding would have been really helpful, and if I had gotten a K or R award at that time, I could have given back the remaining F32 funds. Ideally you want to plug a gap in your training during your post-doc, and/or use it as an opportunity to accrue clinical hours towards licensure if you're a clinician.

Noah: Postdocs in our field are typically 2-3 years, unless it is a clinical position which are usually 1 year. I generally think postdocs are best used for establishing independence. I would be looking for the opportunity to fill a training gap you need to fill to become the professional you want to be. This can be research and/or clinical in nature. Also, clinicians will need roughly 1,500 supervised postdoctoral clinical hours to obtain licensure in the US. Thus, having a postdoc that provides you with the training your desire and a path to independence is ideal.

3. What are the essential skills and experiences that a graduate student must obtain during their studies to be a candidate for future academic opportunities? What skills and experiences set graduate students apart?

David: The skills needed for a successful career will depend a lot on the track one aims to pursue. For a research scientist in a medical setting strong research training is key, and having as many publications as possible, as for good or bad, a lot of weight is put on pubs. If you want to go tenure track in a psychology or neuroscience department then teaching experience will be a lot more important (and publications).

Noah: This will depend on the type of career you want but, in general, you want to cover a few domains. The relative proportion of these activities will vary depending on the type of opportunities you want to be competitive for. For better or worse, in academia, publications are considered to the currency of the land. In my experience, CVs are evaluated first by how many pubs do they have, then by how many of them are first author, and then by what journals you published in. Grant productivity is a close second to pubs, but this varies on the opportunities. Small liberal art colleges often do care as much about grants as large research institutions. Another domain is teaching. Except for academic medical centers and non-academic jobs, teaching is often an important pillar of your work. Thus, having some experience in this area can be helpful, but it probably won't make you stand out unless it's a teaching heavy position. Not having it is more likely to be harmful than having it is to be helpful. Unless you have a teaching award or specialized credentials. Evidence of mentorship experience can be a nice supplement as many positions require PhDs to supervise others.

Aside from these large bins, there are a few individual skills that have potential to make you stand out (again, depending on the area). Statistical skill almost always goes over well. Specialized clinical skills are another. Imaging can be viewed positively, with some variability. Activities that demonstrate a commitment to social justice, inclusion, and equity for those from diverse/underrepresented groups can stand out as well.

4. How did you decide between a career in academia vs outside academia? Are there careers outside of academia related to substance use and mental health that still require strong substantive and methodological knowledge?

David: This is a personal decision one has to make based on their goals and interests. Having strong methodological knowledge is a plus wherever you are. There are a lot of jobs in the private sector for people with a background in research and interest in addiction, though often in the private sector one has less control over the sorts of research questions they address. I straddle both worlds by working in academia while also collaborating with privately held companies and startups.

Noah: I made the decision to stay in academia because I wanted to answer the questions I think need to be answered and I love teaching. There are plenty of jobs outside of academia and most will require both content and methods expertise. Aside from start-ups and tech companies, there

are many private research contractors, such as FastTrack and Optum Research. In these positions, project management, methods, analytic, and writing expertise is highly sought after. You also have a limited ability to answer research questions you think need to be answered. Instead, you are tasked with designing an approach to answering the clients' questions.

5. Benefits/Challenges related to hard-money vs soft-money positions?

David: Hard money= greater security/less ulcers, but also often lower pay. Hard money positions also usually involve teaching, which is great if you love teaching, but not so good if you don't. Soft money= less security/more ulcers, but often you're able to set your own salary. The problem is you then have to find the money to cover it. Being on soft money feels more entrepreneurial. That said, a lot of people in soft money environments do really well spreading their efforts across other people's grants. This is easiest to do if one has highly saleable skills like a strong stats background, or being clinically trained and able to treat/assess patients in clinical trials.

Noah: But it boils down to the tradeoff between security, flexibility, and salary. Hard money positions come with decidedly greater security, especially after tenure, but usually have less flexibility and lower salaries. These jobs also have mentorship and/or teaching requirements that account for the security. Soft money positions almost always have higher salaries, but it's up to you to find an external entity to cover that salary. Accordingly, there is greater flexibility because you need to find salary coverage. For example, if you are clinically trained, in a soft money position you can see patients to fill out your salary. In some soft money positions you can set your salary, but many have predetermined salaries based on rank (i.e., assistant, associate, and full professor) and it is up to the investigator to convince someone to cover part of that salary. While stressful, this means you kind of your own boss.

6. How do you juggle mentoring, and providing feedback to students while also maintaining productivity on your own work/research?

David: Full disclosure, I work in a hospital/medical school so don't have a massive mentoring load, but I always feel like it works out time-wise. I think on the whole the students who work in my lab save me a lot of time in terms of the work they produce. So while I may end up giving up some time to train and mentor them, they more than return the favor.

Noah: Fortunately, a lot of mentorship happens in the context of research, so these activities are often pulling in the same direction. In my view, great mentorship means providing a path to independence. Thus, the better mentorship I can provide the more a mentee can work independently. Overall, this leads to more productivity. However, not all mentorship is research based. A general guideline for time allocation is 50% research, 30% teaching/supervision, 20% service. Mentoring and providing feedback can be distributed across several of these categories. I think it is also important to note that for many of us our greatest contribution to the field will be our mentorship rather than our science. As such, I view mentorship as essential as pubs and grants.