

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

Fenton-O'Creevy, M., Brigham, L., Jones, S., Smith A. (2015) Students at the academic-workplace boundary: Tourists and sojourners in practice based education. In Wenger-Trayner, E., Fenton-O'Creevy, M., Hutchinson, S., Kubiak, C., Wenger-Trayner, B. (Eds.) *Learning in landscapes of practice: Boundaries, identity, and knowledgeability in practice-based learning* (43-63). New York, NY: Routledge.

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

		<u>Imagined Trajectory</u>	
		Inside CoP	Passing Through
<u>Participation</u>	Low	Marginal	Tourist
	High	Apprentice	Sojourner



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

An aerial photograph of a university campus. The foreground is dominated by a large, vibrant green lawn with several paved paths crisscrossing it. In the middle ground, there are several large, multi-story university buildings with light-colored facades and dark roofs. The campus is surrounded by lush green trees. In the background, rolling green hills are visible under a sky filled with soft, white clouds. The overall scene is bright and sunny, suggesting a pleasant day.

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**”*

An aerial photograph of a university campus. The foreground is dominated by a large, well-maintained green lawn with several paved walkways. In the middle ground, there are several large, multi-story buildings with classical architectural features, surrounded by lush green trees. In the background, rolling green hills are visible under a sky filled with soft, white clouds. The overall scene is bright and scenic.

Thank You!

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