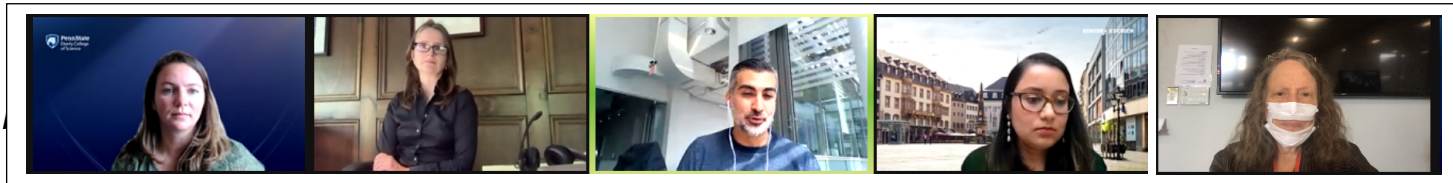


Panel discussion: A variety of biomedical careers April 28, 2021

Summary by Kara Farquharson and Todd Dowrey



Panelists (pictured left to right):

Dr. Suzanne Kijewski; Technology Licensing Officer, Penn State University

Dr. Danielle Gross; Patent Agent, Volpe Koenig

Dr. Hicham Naimy; Scientific Publications Senior Manager, Takeda

Dr. Madhurima Das; Consultant, Simon-Kutcher & Partners

Dr. Barbara Schreiber; BUSM Associate Professor of Biochemistry (Moderator)

The goal of Boston University's Broadening Experiences in Scientific Training (BU's BEST) is to expose trainees to a variety of biomedical career paths. On April 28th, 2021, GMS PhD alumni discussed their various interesting careers in a panel discussed facilitated by Dr. Barbara Schreiber, associate professor of biochemistry at BU School of Medicine (far right photo).

Dr. Naimy described his trajectory from a graduate student to a scientist specializing in mass spectrometry where he decided to make a career change to scientific writing. He spent time learning the field of scientific writing in industry and has now transitioned to a managerial role where he oversees a team of writers among other responsibilities

Dr. Das did her PhD work in a structural protein lab where she moved on to a consulting position in healthcare. She had taken some classes at BU in the managerial school learning about this field and got exposure to people who had careers in this area. She explained how consulting firms tend to hire almost a year in advance and added that she applied for these positions before she even had a thesis defense date. Currently, she advises pharmaceutical companies in the life sciences on a variety of their business models.

Dr. Gross did her PhD in biochemistry at BU and progressed to doing a postdoc at UPenn in more of a physiology focused lab. She realized she really enjoyed the writing process in science and decided to pursue a medical writing job where she wrote and presented on new drugs coming to market for a pharmaceutical company. She eventually transitioned to patent law where she currently works on a variety of patents including life sciences and medical devices.

Dr. Kijewski focused on immunology in her graduate work and completed a thesis centered around HIV. She transitioned out of wet lab research and sat in on more business focused classes at BU where she learned about the field of patent law. She has had a variety of positions in this field ranging from a start-up to a hospital setting. She currently works at Penn State advising academic scientists on patents.

What recommendations do you have for pursuing a career path in your field?

Dr. Gross started by recommending that graduate students branch out to other fields and gain experience in things other than just lab-based research. She mentioned that it is helpful to keep your individual likes and dislikes in mind when exploring new career paths. She spent a lot of time writing in science and noted how impactful it was to receive feedback from professional scientific writers.

Dr. Naimy echoed that it is important to follow what you enjoy in science and use the kinds of work you enjoy to guide your career search. He added that students should reflect on their strength and weaknesses and try to develop their weaker areas. Where he is not a native English speaker, he took classes in his off time to develop this skill. He noted the importance of organizational skills and teamwork in any career that you can pursue in science.

Dr. Kijewski mentioned that it can be difficult to know what careers actually match your strengths and how she had to conduct informational interviews and build a network to learn about what opportunities would suit her background and interests. She added that it is helpful to build relationships with scientists at all levels as effective communication is important in many science fields.

Dr. Das added that most people are more than happy to share their experiences through informational interviews even if you don't have an existing relationship with them. She also noted that experiences in a scientific field, such as writing, other than lab research during your PhD can show employers in those fields that you are really interested in those career paths.

If you are in a position to hire, what are you looking for in a candidate?

Dr. Kijewski emphasized that she wants a candidate that has interest but can also clearly summarize their research, since communication is a large portion of the job description. She also emphasized the use of your network and to continue networking with alumni, as the sector is smaller than previously thought.

Dr. Naimy explained that his field has a shortage currently, so there are always open roles available. The jobs do require previous experience however, any skills that are transferable such as writing a manuscript, understanding grant submission and review processes are beneficial. Additionally, showing enthusiasm and the willingness to learn can come across well.

Dr. Gross said that once your foot is in the door, the opportunities within the field opens. The first job is the stepping-stone into the field, so don't dismiss a job that is not your dream job. It becomes easier to seek new opportunities.

Is there anything you would have done differently if you could do it over again?

Dr. Kijewski wishes that she had considered business or law school during the period in between undergraduate and graduate degrees rather than waiting until post-graduate degree. It would have opened doors earlier.

Dr. Das agreed as she would have taken business courses simultaneously with the science courses to gain exposure for a field outside of science. If she had done so, she would have had a better understanding of the aspects of her work and would not have felt rushed to be on a similar level to her peers.

Dr. Gross would not have spent five years as a post-doc. Instead, she wishes she had stepped away from research sooner and gone to law school prior to having kids.

Dr. Naimy agreed with the above and explained that he would have educated himself more during his graduate degree about career options.

How do you manage work-life balance?

Dr. Gross and Dr. Kijewski both have young children. Dr. Gross revealed that she currently works part-time in order to focus on her children. She noted if she is not able to complete her work during the day, she sometimes works at night in order to compensate. Although this may have hampered her career, she has no regrets. Dr. Kijewski agreed that she would work when her children were asleep and prioritize them during the day. However, since the reopening of the preschools, she has been able to work during business hours again. Dr. Kijewski explained that her field is flexible and even pre-pandemic, allowed their employees to prioritize their kids.

Dr. Naimy finds it challenging to maintain his balance as employees and clients are in different time zones globally. Additionally, he has limited vacation time but works with his team to ensure that it is used. When on vacation, only critical needs are responded to. Dr. Das agreed that using vacation time is critical!

Lastly, Drs. Naimy and Das explained that when evaluating labs and new job opportunities, evaluate those you will be working with. Talk to the employees about their experiences. This will inform you on how the company culture is as well as their personalities. Don't be afraid to ask questions.

We would like to thank the panelists for their time contributed to this panel.