

Graduate Student Presentations.

University of Guelph Graduate Skills Development Conference, March 2021

Transcript:

[Travis Francis]

OK, I think we'll get started. Hi everyone, my name is Travis Francis. I'm on the organizing team for the Grad Pathways Conference. We're very excited to have all of our speakers here today, sharing with all of you their experience of grad school and some of the skills that they've developed over the course of their academic journey. We have six presenters, so the way that it's going to work is each presenter is going to give their talk for approximately 10 minutes and then the next speaker will give their presentation and then at the end will open up the floor for questions of which you can either request to ask a question in person, or you can put it in the chat throughout the hour long presentation session. So without further ado, I will hand it off to Tanya.

[Tanja Samardzic]

Hi there, my name is Tanya. I am a PhD candidate in applied social psychology and my presentation will be on making research accessible. Next slide, please. Thank you.

So in my brief presentation I want to highlight the importance of knowledge mobilization, discuss critical community engaged scholarship as it relates to my work at the Community, Engaged Scholarship Institute and leave you with some knowledge mobilization translation tips.

So many of us are familiar with the limits to the ivory tower so we tend to speak in very specific ways, write in very specific ways with area specific jargon and researchers tend to focus on their own research needs and priorities, so the approach tends to be doing research on as opposed to with communities of interest. And as we know there is limited access to knowledge for non academic affiliated folks, especially community partners. For instance, it tends to be pay per use for Journal articles that can be up to about \$40 US per article, so that really limits the degree of knowledge access that many of these community partners have. And as we probably know, there is limited dissemination of findings on the part of researchers. It tends to be in peer reviewed academic Journal articles again that are limited access, and there isn't very much consideration of the knowledge mobilization techniques that we could be employing to make our research more accessible to the larger public.

So why knowledge mobilization is so important. There's many reasons. It allows those who are not privy to our jargon to access our findings. So it allows things to be written in a way that those who aren't privy to our specific areas, language, and ways of speaking to understand what we found and have access to it, to make decisions for their own organizations. And it doesn't keep information locked away in that ivory tower again, and it allows those who need it to have access to it for policy decisions for decision-making and the like. It has become very important for many granting applications, and it's actually starting to be implemented as a contingency of funding, especially with respect to Tri-Council. So it's something that we should be thinking about. And more generally it's an important transdisciplinary scale that we can have in our toolbox regardless of where we end up, whether it is the Academy or in a more industry oriented field.

So a lot of my work has begun to be sort of outlined or framed within this critical community engaged scholarship framework, and it's really a work with communities that doesn't do some of those or doesn't engage in some of those pitfalls that I just mentioned, and so really the framework emphasizes community identified needs. So not that doing research on but doing research with based on what communities are identifying as their needs. There is a process of clear communication within with both community and University partners, shared input, mutual benefits, and meaningful outcomes that are important for the community partner as opposed to what is important for the researcher. And key to this is sensitivity to power balances. There tends to be this idea that because we're part of the University, we are the expert, and so coming at it from a sense of reciprocity and wanting to learn from each other in each person having skills that they can bring is really important.

So the Community Engaged Scholarship Institute for some of you who are not familiar is an excellent resource that we have at the University of Guelph. It brings together community partners with on campus researchers in a collaborative way and it allows for the use of University resources to advance community identified research goals. So it's really a great place if you're doing a dissertation or a Masters thesis with the Community partner. It there is the provision of a lot of resources out there and one of the great things about it is that it employs students as research assistants, which is where I've been working for over a year now.

And in terms of my work, there's multiple things happening at once. Usually we tend to work with violence against women or indigenous organizations, and a lot of the skills that I use are a lot of the skills I learned in my program, so writing literature reviews, analyzing data, and the like.

But one of the things that I've really learned in my work is using knowledge mobilization strategies as a way to deliver information. So a final report to a community partner does not need to be a written document that's 50 pages long. We have delivered final reports by way of a PowerPoint that really summarizes the information, we've delivered final reports by way of graphic or visual information, particularly with the recent project with an Indigenous organization. That was particularly effective for the population that we were serving. We've summarized findings by way of a video, and another way to do it is to have an informal meeting where findings are just delivered verbally. Another thing that goes quite a long way is a fact sheet or brief summary that's written in plain language that can be shared with many different people in the community, and it allows for greater access. So really, thinking about knowledge mobilization as quite an open way of sharing findings that really gets us thinking beyond the final report means a written document.

So there are some strategies that you can employ today in your research or in your work to mobilize your knowledge. So explaining the findings in a title don't make your reader work for figuring out the information, so putting the title next to the graph is a really great way.

Get creative when you're reporting your findings. If you are looking at the number of times terms are used, for instance, a word cloud is really great and it's a free way of delivering your information in sort of a visual format. There is also a really great function in Microsoft Word. You can look at the reading level to see what grade level you're writing at. So for instance, I looked at my qualifying exam and I was writing at a Grade 13 level.

Another format that you can use is an infographic, so this is the summary of a study we published. It uses pictures. It has all of the main points. We used Canva. It's a free service

that allows you to make beautiful infographics quite easily. And it's a really great way of disseminating your information further.

So some important questions to ask yourself when grappling with knowledge mobilization. Which method of mobilization will be most effective for both your project and the Community partner you're working at? There's no one size fits all option. How can I deliver these findings in a way that community partners can continue to use them? And where can I find additional help?

And so I just listed a few resources here. I'm happy to share these slides or the conference organizers can share these slides as a great starting point for starting to think about knowledge mobilization, including creating a knowledge mobilization plan.

So I have to leave right at 3:00 o'clock, but here's my email in case anyone wants to send me direct questions. If they're not in the chat throughout the presentation. Thank you so much for your attention. I appreciate it.

[Waed Hasan]

Hi everyone, my name is Waed Hasan and I'm an international student pursuing a PhD in English literature at the University of Guelph. Next slide please.

OK, so as the slide shows I have a dual BA in English literature and creative writing from Manhattanville College in Purchase, New York and recently I completed an English MA at Brock University. For my presentation, I want to talk about self reflection and accountability.

These two interconnected skills are a reflection of my accumulated experience throughout my academic career, while graduate studies and academics in general have helped me develop, you know, numerous skills such as critical thinking, time management, and oral communication. I selected these two skills because of their value and the necessity in the workplace. And of course, your personal endeavors. So I want to start with the definitions. Self reflection is like looking into a mirror and describing what you see. Of course, this is a metaphor for internal reflection. Critical self reflection relies on the assessment of our actions. We should observe our actions, mistakes and successes in order to learn from past experiences and continue to develop accordingly, and is a way of checking in with yourself and reflecting on your ways of working and how you study.

As for accountability, it is the quality of being accountable for our actions and choices. Being accountable implies awareness and acceptance for the responsibility of our actions and choices despite the value of the outcome. These two skills are ones that grow out of practice and they depend on each other. They are complementary traits. Self reflection alone does not lead to sustainable results. While it is important to review what we have done, it is equally important to take responsibility for these actions. On the one hand, this means that we will accept our failures and mistakes and consequently learn from them. On the other hand, this is also how we will take note of our successes and celebrate them. If we practice a combination of these two skills, we allow ourselves to learn from our choices, develop healthy patterns and grow confidence in our ability to lead and choose. Remember, a leader is someone who makes leaders out of others. So ask yourself this question; how can you be a leader if you don't grow internally first? Next slide please.

So why are these skills useful? On a personal level these two skills are necessary for personal or professional growth. Remember, school and work are all about processes and learning through experience. Self reflection is a form of constructive self criticism. By weighing the effectiveness or lack thereof of our actions and methods, we are able to develop more

effective mannerisms of behavior. For example, consider a situation where you are in charge of organizing an event. After the event ends, you can choose to put the experience behind you or you can make the decision to learn from it. If you choose to learn then you can use self reflection. This process entails reflecting on all points of the event, the preparation for the event, how the event panned out and the results. This reflection can be a conversation you have with others, with yourself, or you can write about it. I personally prefer writing about it. By doing so, you must focus on both the negatives and positives. When you identify the negatives or mistakes you're able to locate the things you need to work on. For example, if the event ran overtime or your speakers went overtime, then you might need to work on time management, which is an important skill in the workplace.

It's essential to remember first that you also have to identify the positives, and you must congratulate yourself on them and emulate the actions that led to these successes. It is this process that will help you learn more about your own skills and how to go about organizing a better event by accumulating better skills. So, after self reflection comes accountability. Accountability is twofold. On the one hand it serves responsibility, and on the other hand it allows you to claim ownership. Following up with the same example, if the time management problem is because you did not plan thoroughly enough, then you must recognize that you did not manage the time well and do not go about this in a destructive manner. Instead observe where you went wrong and work on not repeating this pattern. Remember, this is a process and claiming responsibility is the first step.

So of course you might be wondering how these habits translate into useful skills in the workplace. For sure, accountability and self reflection are valuable job skills. In fact, I have used these two examples in various interviews. Employers look for self sufficient employees who can take responsibility and show progress, especially as more jobs are moving into self monitored online path platforms due to the pandemic. Naturally, as you learn the handles of your job you will be subject to reviews, checkins and criticism. Self reflection ensures that you are ready for these three steps. Why? Because you have already identified what might be lacking or what is already there. In a way, practicing self reflection ensures your ability to accept constructive criticism. Hence you are able to handle conflict more consistently at work. So while I had times where I wanted to take criticism personally, practicing accountability has helped me look at criticism as a growth opportunity. So I encourage you to use self reflection and accountability as examples of skills you have because it will show that you are responsible and aware and you will look like an employee who needs minimal management and can handle leadership positions. Next slide please. Thank you.

So now that we have covered the importance of these skills, let's reflect on the types of feasible opportunities you should consider pursuing at University. Useful opportunities are ones that encourage you to practice the role of leader, work with others and take on responsibilities. I encourage you to join clubs and I also encourage you to consider taking your club experience to a new level. You can achieve that by starting your own club, or becoming a board member. These two options place you in a leadership position where you have your own designated roll with the necessary responsibilities.

Another opportunity is practicing research and going to conferences. This will help you familiarize yourself with your field, but it would also help you get used to following processes. Research requires time and effort and it is often associated with reaching out to professors, classmates and others. You can also take a campus job. Working on campus will develop your professionalism and will help you develop responsibility as well. If you are working you will be held accountable for your results, so practicing accountability is like being a step ahead.

Finally, I do encourage you to work with ESL students, even if you are one yourself, because you learn more through cross cultural interactions. But regardless of what you choose to do, you should make sure to seek out positions that might push you outside your comfort zone. These couple of years of school should be the years you pursue personal growth, which means pushing boundaries a little. So while I dread group work, working with others has been very useful because it's a way to assess my skills in reflection to others. Others will be able to provide constructive criticism and they will help you learn more about your skills and their own. Finally, campus engagement is your opportunity to meet others with similar interests. Whether it is faculty, staff or other students.

So speaking of my own experience, I've had various experiences during my academic career which have made me who I am today. I know that sounds like a cliché, but I have learned a lot during my University experience. One thing that I learned is that if you have the opportunity when you're selecting an on-campus job, choose jobs that are useful for your resume and that foster skills relevant to your future work positions. For example, I have consistently worked in writing centers at my universities so I can develop experience in teaching writing. Now I can confidently say that I have four to five years of experience in that specific field.

Another really helpful experience was engaging in independent research. I conducted research on the writing center based on a misconception that I originally had. This experience taught me how to apply for, you know, research approval, turn ideas into theories, and work in the field with others. Actually, I was able to present my work at two national conferences which you know solidified my knowledge and frankly it made me really proud of myself.

This brings me to an essential point. Make connections with your professors, fellow classmates and other staff members because they are part of the broader community that you want to be a part of.

And finally, be kind to yourself if you are here, you are doing something right. Please don't hesitate to contact me for questions or remarks on the email provided in the slide right here, and I'll be here after other presenters finish. Thank you for listening and tuning in.

[Sharon Wang]

Hi good afternoon everyone. My name is Xueqi Sharon Wang. I'm really excited to be here today to share with you some skills I have learned since my graduate degree and before I get started I'd like to first offer gratitude and respect to the Treaty lands and to the indigenous people on whose traditional territory I am residing today.

A very brief self introduction. I was born and raised in China. I came to the University of Guelph as an international undergraduate student and graduated with a major in biological science and a minor in mathematical science. After working in the private sector for a few years, I returned to U of G in 2006 for a Masters degree and started my PhD research the fall of 2008. In the past I have co-chaired department committees, organized many conferences and holiday parties, hosted different equity diversity, inclusion initiatives and many more. And recently I took a part time position with Gen EQ Advisory Group that aims at advancing the status of women at the University of Guelph. And outside of the campus. I am a grad student and postdoc counselor in the Canadian Society of Ecology and Evolution. So overall I am a very involved person just about everywhere and amateur party planner by day most of the time.

So throughout my experiences, regardless of what I do and where I am, it is inevitable that I will be working with people virtually or physically distant these days. So how to manage

interpersonal relationships and how to utilize my communicational, social and public speaking skills is a learning process. So today I would like to share with you something I have learned that I hope can benefit you in your day to day lives, and when you're going out to conferences or in a networking event. Next slide please.

To begin with, I would first like to acknowledge that this presentation really is largely inspired by the 500 women scientists career series that took place February 25th. I moderated the session with some really phenomenal speakers, and we had a great discussion about how to utilize and mobilize our networks to promote our career success. So today I adapted some of the key takeaways and some of my personal lessons in the following couple of slides.

And I have names and Twitter handles for those if you'd like to follow up with them.

So first. All good, no worries. This is confusing for everybody. So first we need to have a positive and resilient expectation about networking. The spelling of network has the word work in it so treat it sincerely and seriously because it takes a lot of effort and it takes time. It is the same thing as growing your tomato plant. You'll have to seed it, nurture it, wait for it to grow and flower before you can harvest the fruit. So getting to know your colleagues and growing connections is a continuous process so you must patience and be consistent. Next slide please.

Secondly, networking is a complex integration of different skill sets, it involves social skills, marketing skills, communicational and public speaking skills and many more. One thing I would like to invite you to think about is are you using language as appropriate to the target audience? As graduate students we are so used to use big words and jargons that can't even be recognized by Microsoft Word. I use the speaking style that we use in formal presentations. It makes us sound so smart, but so inaccessible, especially when we're talking to someone who is not from your specific field of study, who is a potential recruiter or scholarship donor.

I am sure most of you have heard or even have your different elevator pitch. So let me ask you this. How many versions of elevator pitch do you have? Do you have one for the general audience? Do you have one for scientists within and outside of your field of study? Do you have one for government or NGOs for those who are more interested in the implication of your research rather than the specifics? So think about that and then practice lots and lots of practice on how to best promote yourself. Next slide, please.

And remember that your networking style is a representation, an extension of who you are as a person. Every individual has a different personality. We all have a different style of communication, so there is no one size fits all approach when it comes to networking. Do you prefer lengthy and in-depth conversation in a small group setting? Do you like to check in with different people like a social butterfly? Do you like to talk to new colleagues more casually, over beers and chicken wings? Or are you more of a social media expert that you do a ton of communication online? A big part of being efficient and networking is to recognize what works the best for you and take points.

And so once you identify your very own networking philosophy, I'd like to provide you some pebbles to help you grow your network. Pebble number one; recognize your network. We often mistake networks as mentorship and only consider those who are more experienced and or at a more advanced career stage than us. That is not true in my perspective. Your network is made up of collaborators and of people who provide you support and encouragement. It is those who you will be working with for the next 20 or 30 years. And realistically speaking, they will be your colleagues, your lab mates, other graduate students

you met at conferences, and more often than not, your undergraduate students. So recognize your existing network and your support group, because that is the foundation upon which you want to get started. Networking is not always about establishing new connections. It is about building stronger connections from within your circle. So take some time to reach out to people you haven't talked to in a long time and check in.

Pebble number 2; be clear and be authentic. Keep in mind that there are different types of connection within your network. It is not, not always about gaining benefit for your own growth. It is about building trust on a professional but also on a personal level. So be genuine and be authentic. This way when we do need to reach out for advice and mentorship, we're doing so from a strong and trustworthy foundation and be specific about what you really need, where you're hoping to get out of. Are you looking for career advice? Are you looking for a solution to particular problems? Make it precise and clear so communications between you and your contacts can happen very efficiently. And believe me, you will get more personalized and more specific advice when your contact already knows you as a person and what you're looking for exactly.

Pebble number 3; make space and be an ally. Network to me is a community. We are only as strong as our network and it's not always about us growing new connections. It is about making everyone within our network stronger. As an advocate for equity, diversity, and inclusion myself, I really like to invite you to put an EDI lens on your networking style. This means inviting people to your circle, introducing contacts to others who you like, who you think could potentially establish collaborations. It is being inclusive and being an ally for those who are less privileged.

A personal invitation and a small piece of encouragement can go a long way, so next time when you're in a conference, can I challenge you to reach out and deliver a sincere compliment to one of your favorite student presentations. Can I challenge you to invite a new grad student for lunch? Can I challenge you to talk to someone who is alone and nervous at a big conference?

Pebble number 4; this is where I would like to bring it home and remind you once again that networking is work. When you make new connections, make sure you follow up within a reasonable time frame, a couple of days at most. And persist. It could be a thank you email, some seasonal greetings. It could be a congratulations note when you hear about their recent accomplishment. And lastly, Next slide. Thank you.

I would like to propose a networking pipeline for you to think about before I wrap up this presentation. So first of all is goal setting. Is there a particular group of people you would like to reach out to? Would you like to talk to them individually or would you like to go with your labmates? And be realistic. Would you like to get their business card for future collaborations or would you like to hear more about their ongoing projects? Do you want to ask questions about one of their manuscripts or would you like to learn more about the experiences? You need to establish clear and realistic goals before you get started. And preparation is key.

Do you have your questions in a clear and accessible language? Do you have ice breaker questions in your back pocket? Have you modified your elevator pitch to fit your audience? And of course figuring out what platform you like to proceed. Is there a conversation cafe you'd like to participate or are you using hashtags on social media to reach out? So think it through before you go into a networking event and remind yourself to be accessible, genuine and authentic when you're talking to people and follow up afterwards. You can always work with your colleagues and lab mates to prepare a follow up email template for thanks, gratitude

and all future collaborations so you do not have to reinvent the wheel every single time. And lastly, repeat. It takes practice to create your own networking pipeline, so keep at it.

And finally. I would like to end this presentation with a quote from Jordan Hoehlin that I think truly captures the unfamiliar and awkward nature of networking. That is, "it never gets easier, you just get better". Thank you very much for your time and I'm very looking forward to your questions.

[David Said]

Hi everyone, it's great to be here with you today.

First of all, I'd like to thank all the, you know, the conference organizers who put a lot of effort and planning into organizing this conference and making this panel possible. I would also like to thank, you know, the wonderful amazing PhD students that I share this virtual space with because they have such deep and rich, diverse experiences that they're sharing with us all today. So I'm very thankful to share this space with them today as well. Next slide, please.

So my name is David Said. I'm a PhD candidate in the Department of Political Science. I research the governance and public administration of human rights and protections in Canada from the perspective of tribunals that deal with social welfare policy. So things like the Social Benefits Tribunal in the landlord tenant board and what I'm going to be talking to you about today, what I hope to share with you today is how to go beyond your program to get involved in different things to develop a certain number of skills that you may find useful both in your academic work and in industry. And what I mean by going beyond your program is being involved in activities that are not directly related to fulfilling your particular degree requirements.

So for example, things like completing coursework, qualifying examinations, comprehensive exams, research proposals, or even writing the dissertation itself. And I know the conventional understanding of pursuing our degrees via doctoral or Masters is you get in and you get out. So for example, we're here to do the work and be distracted with other tasks and projects as little as possible and then move forward with our lives into hopefully academic careers. But in my opinion, there's a great deal of added value by going beyond your program because the University as a whole has a lot more to offer, especially in the sense of developing these certain skills.

So while the common understanding is that one pursues a PhD, chases an academic career or position, today's reality is that not everyone who successfully completes a PhD will actually in fact end up in academia and to be honest, they may in fact find themselves applying for jobs in industry, which is perfectly fine as well. So the skills that I'm going to share with you today, in my opinion, are applicable in academia and relevant to our work, but also transferable to industry. And before moving on, I want to make it extremely clear both to myself and to you that learning to master these skills is an ongoing process. So even though I have the privilege today to share my experiences with you all, it's important for me to know that you know these skills are continuously being developed as time goes on, and that I've not quite mastered all of them fully. Next slide, please.

Awesome, thank you. So the first skill that I want to, you know, touch on a little bit is teamwork and collaboration and this is a skill that shows you have the ability to build collaborative relationships, work effectively and efficiently with others and manage and respect diverse backgrounds, opinions, thoughts and perspectives. So being able to articulate this career competency or in other words, being able to show evidence that you have this skill

would normally come from any work or activity that requires a group of people working towards a common goal or objective.

So I realized that I started developing this skill during my time as the graduate student representative for the Department of Political Science. So grad rep roles may vary a little depending on the program or department you are in, but typically these roles assist in building a connection between the department administration, so, for example, your department chair and the graduate student body in your department. Sometimes there is more formal work that a graduate rep must do or has to do, such as being part of hiring committees. But more often than not, this is a role that's defined by the person themselves, and essentially they make what they want of that role.

So when I was voted by my colleagues in the department to represent them as the grad rep in 2018, I noticed we didn't really have much of a grad conference or workshop, so I took this as an opportunity to bring together a team of graduate students from, you know, across the College of Social and Applied Human Sciences, to bind together and build this graduate student workshop, which we called the Challenge of Change and the poster on the slide is one example of kind of how we marketed it and sent it out, and we were able to attract a number of students from other universities across Ontario to come to the University of Guelph and participate in this workshop, which led to other amazing features, such as building connections and networks with each other.

And so, organizing a conference and organizing a grad workshop, I mean, I'm sure the organizers of this particular conference could tell you that it takes a lot of collaboration, a lot of teamwork, a lot of planning, thinking about budgets, and how things will operate. So ultimately, the relevance of this skill is transferable both in your academic work and industry because it allows you to highlight or show evidence of how you are able to work differently with different people who represent different diverse, backgrounds, opinions, thoughts and strive towards a common goal.

The second skill I'd like to talk about on the next slide is communication. And because of the nature of our work, which requires us to constantly be reading all the time, writing all the time. many of us believe that we automatically have this communication skill. But PhDs tend to develop a reputation for not speaking and writing like normal people. And what I mean by this is that writing the content in plain language is a lot harder than it seems, and many of us know this struggle. Many of us know this feeling when, you know, during our sleepless nights trying to figure out how to get every single word crammed into those SSHRC applications. And that's almost a product of us not quite developing that communication skill yet. So in plain language communication is the ability to communicate complex issues clearly and effectively to diverse audiences.

One area that I found particularly helpful in developing this skill was writing for op eds, such as The Conversation. Op eds are a great publishing venue because they provide evidence that you can show that you are able to communicate and highlight your communication strengths. And the reason for this is because you are taking your position on something or sharing your research findings and simplifying it just enough that non expert audiences are able to comprehend it. So op eds like The Conversation will publish content that focuses on timely evidence-based analysis of real world problems or issues. They publish articles that explain your research and their significance, and articles that explain complex issues, you know from a larger perspective.

So you being able to work with an editor, for example, of an op ed will help you refine your communication skills because you will realize you are able to communicate your complex ideas and thought process to a wider audience. And this brings me to the final point. In this community, in this skill set is that op eds often reach a wider readership. So, in my first article that I wrote for The Conversation, it received 1934 readers and that may not be much, but by the time I wrote my second article, which was published last year, it received 33,566 readers. So again, this is another way you're able to refine your communication skills and reach a wider set of readers.

The third skill that I started to develop in my time as a PhD candidate at the University of Guelph and outside of my program was leadership. And in its most basic definition, leadership is the ability to lead people. Now this would certainly be a skill that many of us could say we've completely mastered only if all of us completely agree on every decision. So what we sometimes tend to forget, or we even take for granted when we think about the leadership quality or leadership scope, is that we often disagree on many things. Should we increase some fees for some student programs? Should we fund one initiative and not another, and if so, how much? Should we continue to stay in lock downs or return to business as usual? You know, kind of the issue of the day today. These are all disagreements, and for me leadership goes beyond the ability just to lead people. But learning to unify or band together despite our many differences to collectively move forward towards an initiative, a common goal and objective and things that will ultimately improve and change our lives.

So where I had this privilege and opportunity to just scratch the surface of learning leadership skills and an opportunity to practice it was my time in the Graduate Students Association. So in 2019 I was elected by my peers as the President and CEO of the Graduate Student Association, which is the graduate student body that represents grad students across the University of Guelph. And the first thing that I guess the best way to help myself explain leadership and how I developed it was to get to share a story with you.

And the first thing that was tossed on my agenda when I entered into this role was the Student Choice initiative. So I'm not sure if many of you are familiar with this or even remember it, but the Student Choice initiative was a provincial policy by the Ford Government, which changed the way ancillary fees were to be kind of function, so it would give the opportunity for some students to opt out of certain programs and not others. And this, as you can imagine, created a wide number of opinions and differences of thought. So there wasn't much agreement on how to move forward or how to even deal with this. So my first engagement or my first opportunity to deal with leadership was being able to communicate with different student organizations on campus and the University administration to figure out a way of how to deal with the Student Choice Initiative. And I definitely don't have enough time in 10 minutes to go through the details, but I'd be more than happy to answer any questions on this particular matter moving forward.

But there are three things that I learned that I would like to share with you regarding this particular skill. The first is the power of delegation. Leaders can't do everything on their own, and it's important for them to recognize, even though they may be ambitious and want to create all this change and improve lives, things need to be delegated to different roles to achieve those changes. And I learned this lesson through my time with the Graduate Student Association.

The second thing I learned was understanding the process of meaningful change. How do we get to where we want to go? And I learned this lesson through my many conversations with our AVP, Ben Bradshaw where getting the pieces of information to the right people or the

right department starts the process of change overtime and you can see that change will happen. So one example I can give was in our University Center we didn't have many gender neutral washrooms so this was brought to our attention through board members and other students, other graduate students, and through our activity or through our participation on committees like the UC Board, we were able to make that change possible and create gender neutral washrooms.

So the third lesson that I learned was choosing which hill to die on, and that essentially for me personally, was a lesson because I felt like everything needed to be done right away, or you put all your energy and resources into one thing and over my time as a GSA president, I realized if you're passionate about one particular thing, it's going to be that hill that you're going to end up kind of channeling your energy and resources in. Finally, the next slide, please.

The final skill that I want to share with you all is project management. And I can't emphasize enough how important this skill or these sets of skills were for me personally. So I'll share with you a little bit about how I developed some project management skills and how you can develop these skills moving forward. So, I had the opportunity to work with a community partner to help address some of the hardships caused by Covid. I was fortunate to be part of a three member project management team with two other graduate students and together we partnered with the Guelph Arts Council to help develop a COVID-19 relief strategy that would help local artists recover from the financial and economic impact caused by the pandemic.

So our objective here was to help the GAC develop and deliver a successful funding pitch to another community partner, the Oak Tree Project, where one of six charities would be the recipient of \$7500 for this relief. So what we essentially did was we managed a team of 12 undergraduate students through the Icon class to help them develop and deliver this page. So even though we didn't develop it ourselves or deliver it ourselves, we were managing this project from the front to the end. So from beginning to the end.

And there are a number of skill sets here that I'd love to share with you, but the one I'm going to focus on is learning to be agile. Or in other words, learning to fly by the seat of your pants and what this means is being able to adapt to change. And one of the most, you know, perhaps the obvious example I can give you is how Covid changed our lives today. So this would have an impact on our personal academic work, on our personal lives and how we move forward in life. Being agile is definitely something I've learned through project management and I see its relevance in the way I continue to look at my own dissertation or research project. And what this means is your work progresses through small iterations, so small, manageable or bite sized features which you're able to tackle. And in the grand scheme of things, as these small accomplishments take place before you know it, your entire project, or in this case maybe your dissertation starts to take form.

So finally I'd like to end by saying very briefly that, next slide please, that I've come to realize much of this process for me, much of the PhD is very much a transformative experience in the sense that you never really stopped expanding your thinking or skills or networks. And one approach that I found particularly useful for me to broaden or develop these skills, which, you know are quite difficult to compact in 10 minutes was by going beyond my program. But it's also important to note that this should not throw you off track of your own goal, which is to complete your PhD or to complete your studies, but rather consider these things as added value. So going beyond the program will definitely add value in the way skills are developed and learned.

So I want to thank you all for your time and your attention. I'd like to thank again the organizers for putting on this conference and the opportunity for allowing us to share our experiences. I hope you found some of my personal experience is helpful or relevant to you. Please feel free to keep in touch. Thank you.

[Louis Colaruotolo]

Hi everyone, my name is Louis Colaruotolo.

I am trying my best over here to get a PhD in the Food Science Department and today I am going to present a topic called Scientific Improv and before we get started we have to think about the word improv just a little bit. You may have heard improv before in a comedy setting or maybe a friend has dragged you to their improv troop performance that you didn't really want to go to. But today we're going to look at improv through more of a scientific lens. Next slide.

So you might be wondering to yourself, well, when does a graduate student have to improv, and you'll see in a number of different ways when you're explaining your research to your peers that have a base of your scientific knowledge, you are explaining to non academics, if we think about talking to maybe your mother or your uncle about what you are researching and then one that I think is the most important and difficult to master is the dreaded question and answer session that will be at the end of almost every presentation you give as a graduate student. So we're going to focus on that one today. And, for scientific improv we have three main steps. Those are going to be to first listen, then think and lastly we improv. Next slide.

So that Q&A we all know it. It strikes fear in the heart of graduate students worldwide. You have given a presentation that you have practiced to the tee. You have your notes and everything. Now comes the part in which you absolutely cannot study the correct answer for. You have to be able to understand what is being asked in a question and answer session and be able to return a good and logical response, which can be very tough, which is why it's a skill we want to be able to practice. Next.

So I'm proposing a very general question here. As a food science student, questions I would receive would be very different than political science or biological engineering. So let's just propose this very general question. Do you think you can trust methodology X when methodology Y is used more often in this field? It's a very general question that you might receive. So as I'm going through this presentation, try to think about your research, what methodologies are you using right now and what is a similar methodology that is more traditionally used? And as we go through this try to answer this question on your own and we will work through the process of listening, thinking and improving. Next slide.

Alright, that first step is to listen. I am probably not presenting anything here that is mind blowing. You have to listen when someone is asking you a question. So the Q&A in essence is a conversation and in all successful conversations you need to be an active listener. So listening, we want to look at it as an activity. It's not passive, so when you're listening, one thing that is very important is to identify some keywords that are in this question so that original proposed question over there is; Do you think you can trust methodology X when methodology Y is used more often in this field? As you'll see, I have underlined three different phrases that I pulled out that I thought were very important part of this question, the first being trust, the second being used more often, and the third being this field. Next.

So now we have to start thinking about those keywords that we identified. Now the word thinking implies that it takes a little bit of time and your brain has to process a lot of information. You're kind of caught off guard. You spend some time listening. Now you need to form some thoughts in your head. When you are doing a Q&A, try your best not to rush into an answer. If you're looking for ways to buy a little bit of time, try rephrasing the question in your own words as the beginning of your answer. This will give you some time to think a little bit more while you're talking, but it also helps solidify the question in your mind so that you can answer it a little bit better.

So as we're thinking, one thing we want to do is take those phrases that we thought were super important from listening, and we want to start making connections between the keywords and what we want for our future answer. So going back to that original question that we proposed, we look at the first phrase, trust. Trust implies there is a degree of accuracy that we're looking for, and that we have used more often. This is kind of looking at some other traditional methods, so if methodology X is new methodology Y would be old. So it is looking at one and the other, and then lastly the phrase this field. This is a direct comparison to other studies within your field. Now in a multiple disciplinary setting you might be in an audience with multiple different fields, so if you need to answer this question, you need to also think about your audience a little bit more. But ultimately this is a comparative type of question that you want to be able to answer. Right. Next.

OK, it's time to answer that question. Now we are going to improv. A few things before you jump right into it is that you didn't research this question. You have no ability to do that. You are not going to be asked to peer review your answer to your question. You will not be expelled from the University if you do not answer it perfectly. So cut yourself a little bit of slack and try to use what you learned from listening. Try to use what you did from thinking in order to improv your answer.

So we're going to use some of those keywords and those connections and the other very important part about improving is at the end you want to check if your answer was sufficient, because if your answer wasn't perfectly sufficient, you're going to have to rinse and repeat. You're going to have to do it again, which means that there is a another three-step process of listening, thinking and improving.

Alright, so back to that original question. Do you think you can trust methodology X when methodology Y is used more often in this field? Those keywords that we were going to look at was using the word accuracy against tradition and then finishing it off with a comparison within your field. So by identifying the keywords, making those connections to your answer, you not only make sure that you've answered all of the parts of the questions, but you've also built yourself a scaffold for answering, so you'll appear a little bit less scattered, and you can kind of keep track of what you want to say, what you've already said and what you're still planning on saying.

Now the difficult part about this type of presentation is that we're all from very different fields, so I can't really go directly into my explanations for how I would answer this because that's a little bit difficult. But we should know that scientific improv is in all true essence a skill, which needs practicing. So on the next slide you will see that I propose an activity.

Think about this question here. Another sort of general question you might be asked in a Q&A. If your results from experiment X were the opposite, how would that affect your results from experiment Y? So this is a general question. Try to apply it to your research and then as we are doing in scientific improv you want to listen, in this case, you're going to read, but you

want to listen, identify some keywords, think, make some connections, and then improv. Hit on those keywords in those connections in order to form an answer. Now keep in mind, scientific improv is a skill. Skills need to be practiced. Will this make you the best Q&A person ever? Not necessarily, but by developing a skill like this you can decrease your anxiety that leads up to the Q&A session and you can make yourself better at answering questions by recognizing what is at the root of those questions.

So on the final slide, I wanted to thank everyone for listening today. I had a really good time presenting, and if you have any interest in doing a little bit of scientific improv or practicing your skills talking, I host a radio show on the CFRU. That's the school radio. It plays on Fridays at 4:00 PM and the show is called We know some stuff where I interview graduate students from all different departments and we just have casual conversations about what you're studying. A very informal chit chat. It's sort of like explaining your research at, you know, Thanksgiving to your relatives.

And if you do want to be on the show, we can set up an interview time. And when your episode plays on the radio after that, you can put media experience on your resumes and on your CVs. So when you're that boss, and your future employer is asking if you have any public speaking experience, you'll be able to say; Well, of course I was on public radio. So if you are at all interested, please reach out to me at my email or on Twitter or on the website where I keep the archives of all the past episodes for this radio show.

And I want to thank everyone one more time for listening and during the panel at the end of this session. I'm looking forward to listening, thinking and improving my answers to everything. Thanks so much.

[Anita Luu]

Alright, I think everyone can hear me OK I hope. Alright, so I just want to thank the organizers for inviting me to come speak today. I wish there was a conference like this when I first started my PhD, so I'm hoping my experience can be insightful and valuable. You can start the slides. Go ahead.

Alright first slide. So, just to formally introduce myself on the next slide, my name is Anita.

It's virtually nice to meet all of you today. I'm a PhD candidate in the Department of Biomedical Sciences. I specifically work on cancer biology, and I've been here for quite some time now. I'm in my fifth and what will hopefully be my final year of my PhD. And when I first started grad school, I had to admit that I didn't really know what I wanted to do afterwards. And about 2, 2 1/2 years in, halfway in I kind of started to realize that academia wasn't for me. For those of you that are also in lab bench research, you can probably appreciate that lab work can get a little repetitive over a certain period of time, and although failed experiments are a part of being in science, they're not definitely my most favorite part of being in science. So I quickly realized that this wasn't really something I wanted to continue doing for a period of time, so I started, you know, what can I do after my PhD if it's not research and it's not academia? So next slide.

And I did what any good grad student would do, and I googled it and the good news is, there's a lot of jobs out there that you can get, you know, after a PhD that's not in academia. But it really just brought me a little more anxiety and more questions. I started to ask myself, you know, what non technical skills do I have? I'm really good at growing cells in a dish and running gels. I spoke at conferences a couple times but I wasn't quite sure if that was, you know, enough skills. I also didn't know what work experience I had, because as you know,

some job postings ask for a certain period of work experience. I did TA but I didn't know if that was considered work experience and probably more importantly, I didn't know what I liked, so it was really hard to envision myself in a career because I didn't know, you know, if that was a good fit for me. Next slide.

So during this time of my little mid-PhD crisis I had a little bit of an eat, pray, love moment where I had to ask myself, you know, who was I outside of being a grad student? So in an attempt to figure this out, I joined various extracurricular activities on campus. So I joined Let's Talk Science, which is a science outreach organization on campus and what we do as a volunteer is you visit classrooms across Guelph and you teach youth science in really fun and engaging ways. So it was a cool way to get involved and teach science. I also was one of the organizers for the Graduate Student Mental Health conferences on campus, and that was because it's a really big passion project of mine. And lastly I got involved in my department. So, I became my graduate representative and in this role I work with other graduate students and I liaison with the chair, and the idea is to basically organize social events to promote a sort of community within graduate school. And I also joined the committee for the Career Development Symposium in an attempt to figure out what I wanted to do.

So all the experiences really afford me a lot of skill sets and the one that I probably like the most was Let's Talk Science. I found this work really meaningful. I was very passionate about science outreach and this worked in my favor because there was a position open on campus to be one of the coordinators in 2019. So I took this role. Luckily I got it and I'm still in this role to this day. So in this role what I do is it's more of a leadership role where I get to manage the other volunteers that go to classrooms. I develop and maintain relationships with educators across Guelph who are interested in our work, as well as University partners that are interested in recruitment events. And probably the more fun part of my job is I get to organize science outreach activities for the community where we invite people to campus to, you know, showcase science in a fun and engaging way.

So all these experiences taught me a lot of different skills, but I only have 10 minutes, so the one skill I want to highlight today is a coordinating skill set. So this coordinating skill set that I learned from doing all these activities really helped me to develop in the four key domains that are the focus of this conference. So it helped me a lot with my research as well, so organizing a conference is really similar to organizing and managing a research project. So I got really effective at managing my own project and the timelines resource in my project. And this became really helpful as I became a more senior member of my lab and I start to manage junior students' projects in the lab as well. It also made me a better collaborator for research projects because I could figure out where everyone could fit in in order to meet a common goal. Next slide.

It also helped me with my communication skills, so being in a leadership position I have to be able to effectively communicate my expectations to my team or others working alongside of me so we can reach our goal together. This is also good for someone like me that's a little bit of an introvert. I was forced to talk to a lot of people. I had to invite them to the conference, invite them to do this talk, that sort of thing. So I got really good at emailing people and knowing what to say to people in those moments that might feel a little bit awkward. Next slide.

It also helped me with my own personal well being and personal effectiveness. So juggling graduate school as well as all these extracurriculars really helped me with project management and time management strategies. I think I really learned what the phrase means; Work smart, not hard. I had a really good awareness of what needed to be done and

what should be prioritized so it would have the biggest impact on what I was doing. And last but not least, it really helped with my career and leadership skills.

So being in a leadership position and working on these organizing committees, I was able to really practice and refine what it means to be a leader. So it allowed me to really reflect on what worked well and what didn't work well, which was a really good experience for me. And more importantly, it provided me with some sort of work experience that wasn't in the lab, right? So we're kind of used to showcasing our lab experience, but this was something that was a little different and gave me hopefully what will be an edge in the future. Next slide.

So what I hope to do when I am finally done my grad school degree and I'm going out to the job market is to leverage everything I've done throughout my whole graduate experience when I go to apply for a job. So my research was really good at giving me the critical thinking, problem solving, and analytical skills. But what I hope to also leverage is all the skills I learned from being in these extracurricular positions. I can confidently say that I'm a project manager since I've led so many different initiatives. I'm a leader. And I think I have really concrete evidence to show that I'm really good at managing stakeholders, and I have really strong communication skills in both a written and oral communication standpoint. Next slide.

That being said, I still obviously don't have this all figured out, right. I don't have a job yet. I'm definitely still in grad school and still a little bit anxious about my future, but what I can confidently say is that the extracurricular activities that I've been involved in in the past couple of years have really fostered my personal and professional growth. I definitely have immense understanding of what I like, what I don't like and what I like to see in a future career path because of these opportunities.

It also allowed me to find purpose outside of my graduate degree. I know that sounds really cheesy, but it's really easy to get caught up in your thesis work in your research project, so doing these other extracurriculars really helped me to gain the perspective that there is something outside of our degree. And these experiences really helped me expand my network, so unfortunately we can't go to conferences, you know, in person anymore, but doing these different activities allowed me to meet people that there was no way I could have met because they're not in my department. So meeting new people was great because I have a lot of new friends, but they also have introduced me to opportunities that I didn't even know existed, so it was a great way to expose myself to these different avenues. And the last slide.

The key takeaways of my talk are you are more than grad school. Depending on what degree program you're in, you might be here for several number of years. So although graduate school is for you to develop research skills, it's also for you to become a young professional when you're done. So take this time to grow as a person and not just a researcher.

Number 2, find organizations or initiatives that you are passionate about and consider getting involved. It gives you a lot of meaning to be able to give back to your community or to be of service. So I hope you can find something that you enjoy as well. And it's never too late or too early to develop your graduate skill set. So I started back in second year and I'm very grateful that past Anita decided to do that because I am a little more confident than I was back then. So take advantage to do those sort of things. There's a ton of workshops on campus, so take advantage of those as well, because you're paying for them in your tuition. And that's what they're there for.

So I think I have my email and my Twitter handle on the next slide, so feel free to reach out if you have any questions or want to chat about this stuff, but other than that, I look forward to the panel. Thank you.

[Travis Francis]

Awesome, well thanks everyone. There were some really good points that were made by all the speakers about the different opportunities that are available on campus for graduate students to further refine and develop their skills. So at this point we're going to open the floor for questions so you can either put them in the chat or you can request to have your video come through so you can ask the question directly. So if there's any questions, enter them now.

[Teresa Crease]

We should just make everyone aware that the session is being recorded if that changes your mind about being on camera, but as Travis said you are more than welcome to engage with our speakers through your video and audio if you like. And I would just like to reiterate Travis' point that those were really awesome talks and I assume all of the presenters are OK with it, we'll be posting, I'll just post the whole slide deck as a PDF along with the recording so I'll let you moderate the questions.

[Travis Francis]

So maybe to start off, I'll ask a question and then everyone on the panel can sort of give their opinions. So given your experience as a grad student, if there is one piece of advice that you could give for a new graduate student to broaden their experience and maybe get some different experiences through jobs on campus or off campus jobs, extra research assistantships or teaching assistantships, what would be the one thing that you would suggest to other graduate students? So I'll give you a second then whoever wants to pop in first, go ahead.

[David Said]

Hey Travis, I think that was a wonderful question. My short answer is get involved. Do your best to reach out to different organizations on campus and see which way you can get involved. I know it's a conventional thing we hear and say often is get involved, but what does getting involved mean? And at least for graduate students and incoming graduate students, it means, for me it meant becoming familiar with, you know, the student body that represents me and represents grad students, and that was the GSA. So it did take some time for me to get to the GSA. I started my PhD in 2015 and it wasn't until 2018 that I got to be the general director and then beyond that that opened up an opportunity to becoming elected as the Graduate Student Association president.

And it just provided, I mean, it's such a learning experience, and obviously it comes with a learning curve because you start understanding the broader ecosystem that the University is. It's a much larger place than we think, right? It's not just a place where we come get a degree and leave, it's a place where you know, kind of like, Sharon's presentation you build networks and you understand how the system works from the administrative perspective, and then once you have that understanding, you know, I had no idea that you kind of know that there's the Senate and then there's, you know the other branch. But once you understand how these systems work, you start understanding OK, like what opportunities you have in your access to funding, or you know assistance that most of us grad students are always talking about and looking for it. So my short answer is get involved. Long answer was, you know try to find avenues into student body organisations.

[Travis Francis]

Awesome, thanks David.

[Sharon Wang]

Yeah, I got involved because I think all of my experience like really started when you look for opportunities. Because sometimes you tend to show up and that was me as an international student, so for me it was a very different experience. So when I started my grad student, grad school, one goal I set for myself is I'm going to do a little bit more. I'm going to get to know people. That you reached out. You're trying to see what opportunities there are. I was in a good timing because Guelph actually was hosting the 2018 annual conference for the Canadian Society of Ecology and Evolution that turned out to have over 900 participants, so I was being part of the LOC and then being involved in organizing a large conference really exposes you to different kind of network collaborations opportunities.

So I think you gotta start somewhere and have an open mind and then you have to recognize that a lot of the time it does take effort and it takes time. It's not going to be investment that you can just trade in within a day. It is, you're going to be in for at least a semester or so. So have some patience, but also constantly remind yourself you're doing a good job because I think often a lot of the extra work is not being recognized, but you are learning and I think you need to focus on the skill sets you get out of it.

[Travis Francis]

Awesome, thanks Sharon. Any other input before we get to some of the questions in the chat? OK, so there's another question. I'm just wondering what everyone's recommendation is on how to build these networks and get involved and develop these skills for those of us with the unfortunate timing of doing grad school during Covid. So if anyone wants to answer that question.

[Anita Luu]

I can start, sorry. And that's a good question and I'm sorry to those that have to start grad school during Covid, because that's gotta be very stressful on top of an already stressful situation. If you have a graduate rep in your department, I would reach out to them. I'm sure your department is still doing some sort of programming right now to try to keep people connected. Obviously this might be a little bit of a shameless plug, but I know there are organizations like Let's Talk Science, we are still running virtually during Covid, so there are still ways to get involved. It might just be a little different than what people are normally used to, but there definitely are some ways. so there's clubs that are still organizing their events virtually if you're still willing to get involved that way.

[Travis Francis]

No, I think you're muted.

[Louis Colaruotolo]

Microphone was off.

[Travis Francis]

There you go awesome.

[Louis Colaruotolo]

I think one thing that's inevitable that we're seeing a lot as we go through these years is social media is becoming much more popular and I think unfortunately a lot of social media is not

seen as a somewhat respectful form of outreach from the uppers in academics. So I think it's something on our own to develop scientific networks through social media. And you'll find out that there are a lot of opportunities out there to join networks that are completely student run and initiatives from people from all across the world.

So something to consider is just like look out, reach out on Twitter or on Instagram, get your feet wet. It might not be your favorite thing, social media, but you will be able to find a lot of people with very similar interests out there who are wanting to build their networks and connect with other people.

[Sharon Wang]

Yeah, I totally agree with the other two suggestions and I do have very much sympathy for people who have to start during Covid. It really is quite unfortunate, I know. And another thing I would like to add on is a little bit of work for yourself is it's not just your wanting to get involved, you have to know what you want to get involved with. So there are lots of different opportunities but you have to know where to look. In order to do that you need to know what you are looking for. So are you looking for project management or are you trying to do outreach? Scientific communication? Are you trying to just help local communities judge science fairs, for example, because I know they're still looking for judges for April.

So there are different things but it involves getting you to think more critically about what you're trying to get out of it, and then you are more directed to know what to look for. And if any of you want to get to know more about different activities on campus or in the community you can reach out to me via email or Twitter.

[Travis Francis]

Awesome. Thanks, Sharon.

[Waed Hasan]

What are you doing now? One more thing I wanted to point out because I did my MA during, you know normal conditions and I'm doing my PhD like my first year during Covid times so I understand that it's a difficult transition. What I would encourage you to do, I think being in Covid time requires a lot more personal effort into finding these networks. You get tons of emails for events, everybody attending that event might have a similar interest. There are chats in all of these events. If somebody is speaking and their research is similar to yours, or they say something that piques your interest, you know, reach out to them. In these chats you can always, you know private message them and let them know who you are.

One way you can get involved on more like a broader level within your program is you can always email your grad director or the assistant and be like, I'm just wondering if there's any representative positions that are open or any volunteer positions that are available that can get me more engaged in the community. Again, like I said earlier, joining clubs, especially clubs that pique your interest or sometimes maybe clubs that aren't related to your interests if you want to reach out to like have networks with people from like different, you know, fields. I know that for our current cohort what we did was just write a message in the class group and we were like class during our class in the message Shadow and Zoom we were like Hi, we're starting a WhatsApp group for all the, you know struggling graduate students. If you would like to join just access your number, here's my email. So yeah, it does require a little more personal effort, but overall it is manageable if you, you know, just persist a little bit.

[Travis Francis]

David, did you have something you wanted to share?

[David Said]

Yeah, I was just going to build a little bit more on Sharon's point. Sometimes I find it or some students may find it difficult in the sense that they don't know what they're looking for, right, right from the get go, but all they know broadly is they want to get involved or there's this need to get involved somehow in some shape or form and my advice to those who don't quite know what you're looking for is pay attention to your emails. I know sometimes it could be, you know, as much work as a PhD itself just to manage your inbox. And all the flood of information that comes in that we have to process quickly. But often times these are very useful, you know, pieces of information that will direct your attention to a particular group that's looking for a committee member or a contributor in one area or another, and it's through those emails, especially from your department that you can get your feet wet into things like, you know student bodies or organisations and things of that nature.

So, one place to start is keep an eye out for openings for your grad rep positions, because from there you can go ahead and ask the previous grad rep in your department, you know what was it like in that role, what value did you get out of it, and what value did you add to it? Because ultimately at the end of the day, we got to have something to build our CVs with, right? So as much as it is great to volunteer our time to do something, they're going to highlight that it adds value to our, you know, our lives as well. So keep an eye for emails. I know it can be daunting and, you know just reading through everything and just it's easier to select all and move to trash, but you might be moving something really important of relevance to you so Yeah, definitely.

[Travis Francis]

So just from my own experience, when I started my PhD in 2019 and there was an email that was sent out as a GRA position through the College of Social Applied Human Sciences. So I had applied. I didn't get it the first semester, but the following semester when the person who got the position's contract was over, I was asked to continue on some of the projects and it gave me some really good experience with finances, researching and learning about the different programs that are offered through my college. And it actually ended up leading to being hired on as my current position, so helping with all the Grad Pathways stuff and it also led to working with the Associate Dean in my college for a Mitacs project. And that project was looking at developing resources for faculty members when they're making their budgets for SSHRC and NSERC and CIHR grants.

So I mean, just building off of what David said, looking at your inbox and taking the time to read through each one, it can definitely provide benefit for getting future jobs and further developing your skills and in different areas. Are there any other comments or questions?

So Sarah had asked; I've heard from some students it's overwhelming to navigate all the skill development opportunities on campus. Do any of you have a favorite session that you could recommend given that you've attended or you've seen advertised?

[Anita Luu]

I guess I can start and then maybe the others can jump in. I definitely agree with that there is a lot you have to, kind of to pick and choose what you want to do. You can definitely do all of it, but it's good to have interest in all of it, but you can't physically do all of these things, especially because they're on Zoom. I personally attended the, is it called the graduate research certificate or something? It's like a monthly, I think it used to be a monthly or weekly

session where you learn about different research skills or graduate research course or something like that. Please correct me.

[Sharon Wang]

Is that the Graduate Project Management certificate like the 12 week one?

[Anita Luu]

Yeah yes thank you. I did that one early on and I thought that was very helpful. I've been to a couple of knowledge mobilization workshops as well, because I'm really interested in science communication and knowledge mobilization, which is why I chose those specifically. But I found those helpful and interesting to me, but I think it's what Sharon said earlier. You have to really just pick and choose what you're interested in learning. And one thing you could do is just reflecting on what you personally want to learn and what gaps you have and then start with those and then maybe pick other ones if you have the time.

[Travis Francis]

Awesome. So one of the things that I want to highlight just while we're on this topic is Grad Pathways actually has a professional skills development course that you can take. I've put it into the chat so this is where we essentially compile all of the different sessions that are offered through all the different service units across the University. So the library, experiential learning hub, career services, things like that. So this is where we have different sessions that are available. We have a calendar where everyone can see all of the different sessions that are available throughout the month, and then you can register for those events and you can actually attend several sessions to receive a course completion certificate. So that's just one of the places where you can go to and see all of the different opportunities that are available to build your skill set. So do we have any other questions?

[Sharon Wang]

Can I add in quickly about the different workshops that the library has? So the library offers a lot of skill development workshops on writings and speakings talking like a professional writing like a professional. I went to the Dissertation Boot Camp when I was defending my Master's thesis even though it is a dissertation boot camp, but it teaches you a lot of different skills for time management and, you know, having reasonable and realistic writing goals than just go to journal writing philosophy. So I think one thing with Covid I struggle a lot is time management and compartmentalize different aspects of my life and professional life, so it's it's good to revisit sometimes those old workshops, even though it may not seem like exactly what we're looking for, but those are transferable skills.

[Travis Francis]

Awesome good point Sharon.

[David Said]

Yeah Travis, I'm not sure who or what department is responsible for the UNIV courses. It could be grad studies or I'm not certain, but one particular thing that I've that I found personally helpful for me and I touched on this a little bit near the end of my presentation. Again you can't really do justice in 10 minutes, but it was the Applied Project Management Course and this was offered, I think we were the pilot class in the fall and we worked with Icon which is offered regularly, it's my understanding, and all that information is there on that last slide, which I believe will be posted. But that for me to be honest, was one of the most useful

courses I've taken I mean in any university, of course from undergrad to Masters to PhD, because ultimately it helps me translate the skills that I am practicing and developing now as a PhD candidate into things that people can comprehend, right, so oftentimes what we're asked is or what we feel we're going to be asked is what is the evidence of your skill so everyone anyone can write on a CV or resume I have communication skills, networking skills, team working and building skills, leadership skills, but you gotta provide some sort of evidence or translate these things into pieces that people comprehend. So for me, this project management course and as quick as it went by, 12 weeks, there was so much added value and it wasn't until I think I took that course and it's odd to say this, but it wasn't until I took that course that I found my own dissertation work progressing in a smoother fashion. Again, it just makes things a little easier. So I just wanted to add that in.

[Travis Francis]

Awesome. Any other comments or questions? We've got some good dialogue going.

[Teresa Crease]

Yeah, I put a question in the chat just for any of our speakers or any of our audience. We're always interested to know, and I think the units on campus that offer these skills development workshops are always interested to know are they offering the things that the students want, and so if you all perceive any sort of major gaps in offerings on campus to let us know because it's a similar question to: everyone who's not in the room please put your hand up. It's hard for us to know what's missing unless we hear from people that, oh, we really wish there were workshops on X, Y or Z, so we can't always promise that we can put those together, but it's good to know where our students feel the gaps are and then hopefully we can work on filling them, so don't be afraid to speak up if you see that, you know I've been looking for a workshop on something and just haven't been able to find it.

And while I, before I forget I'm going to, I just want to encourage everyone to fill out the exit survey, Qualtrics. This is our first annual conference. We hope it will be annual and we need some input from you, the audience and speakers to anyone, everyone how you felt it went and what you liked and what you thought might we could have done better. We're always looking to improve.

[Sharon Wang]

Teri, so one thing I wish it could have for new TAs is I know there are a lot of resources and we have the annual teaching conference near the end of August, but that is often before new grad students start. So for students, especially if they're not from the University of Guelph already coming in in September, they really do miss out on that really great symposium on teaching, graduate teaching and then, and a lot of them have TA assignments in the first semester, depending on of course, how their program works, so there is really very little time for them to navigate a new environment, let alone learning how to do graduate TAship at the very beginning of their graduate degree. So if you know if there is any orientation or skill sets that we can provide to new TAs in the beginning of the semester.

[Teresa Crease]

So that would be, you'd be looking for something that would happen, potentially not at the first week of classes. once everyone gets in but before the end of the first semester, so hopefully it will be useful. So yeah, again the Office of Teaching and Learning and Open Ed, I'm not sure what the division of labor is there, but they're the ones that offer the workshop and they have lots of training resources, but that's definitely a good point because the TAs come in. If they

missed the conference, they have to wait for workshops and it may be too late by the time they finished their first assignment. Thanks.

[Travis Francis]

Do we have any other questions?

[Travis Francis]

Oh, someone's asking David if it was a University course. What was the course number?

[Travis Francis]

I believe it was UNIV 6900, I think, but I'm almost certain. Good memory. I'm almost certain. I could be wrong. All the information will be on UNIV 6900. All the information will be on my last, my second last slide of the presentation.

[Travis Francis]

Any other questions before we wrap up?

[Louis Colaruotolo]

I have a question from the panel for the panel. We all talked about extracurricular activities, things outside of the work bench in the lab and qualifying exams, and here is something I really want to know the answer to is how is everyone making the time to do this? Time management is really tough, but how do the people on the panel find time in their day to go beyond the research and the assignments and the grading?

[David Said]

You don't sleep.

[Sharon Wang]

Excellent question. I don't. My way of coping is not healthy and I don't recommend it for people, but I think one thing I do have that I think is worth thinking about is I have really supportive advisors. So when I'm taking on extracurriculum, even with my position with Genek, one thing I was asked before I took, before I signed the contract is to make sure my advisors are aware. And they're on board, so I think depending on the commitment that you are taking on the extra curricular or you're involved with, it's not a bad idea to let your advisors know, and hopefully they're supportive, because both of mine are, they're very well rounded, and they do recognize the skill development from all set of regular research that you would normally do.

So I do have a lot of support, so I do have some free time that I can do it. But yeah, I know it is a struggle. I absolutely have to agree it is. It is a battle.

[Anita Luu]

I agree, it's a lot of work for sure. It's rewarding, but it's definitely a lot of work. So I agree with what Sharon said. Just make sure your advisor knows, and again, mine is very supportive and I'm lucky to have that. I think David said this too. If you're working in a team, know when you can delegate, and you can rely on your team. If you can't handle everything because you can't do it all, having a very good iCal definitely helps. And just setting the boundaries between work and play, just making sure that, if you're doing work, you're doing work and it's done, but then you're able to switch off so you don't burnout, because that's definitely a very important point with all of this.

[David Said]

I definitely agree with Anita and Sharon. But one thing to be mindful of is that all these obligations and extracurricular activities don't happen all at once, in one semester. They kind of happen over time and over the course of your, of at least my PhD career. And I notice that for myself, I personally try to set, you know, once an academic term or once an academic year one thing that I can be involved in or do aside from my work, if my work allows it. If I'm too busy doing one thing, then you know you recognize that you can't take on extra work, and I think the hardest thing for us as PhD students and candidates to do, is to say no.

I learned that about myself. Being able to say no is the hardest thing, especially at this stage, because we want to, you know, build ourselves up. We want to be involved. We want to contribute. And then before you realize you have so many other things to do and you got your supervisor breathing down your neck, you know knocking on your door going; Where is this paper, proposal you promised me? And where is this draft and then it leads to kind of get the ball rolling into conversations like hey, you gotta plan a study coming up next and Teri would know this. You know there's a, you know, max program durations are reached, what's going on? Because at the end of the day, I feel faculty in the university want us to succeed. So, long way of saying take manageable bite sizes into the extra things you want to do and tackle them, kind of one semester at a time.

[Sharon Wang]

I have to totally agree. I yeah, I think it's a very interesting rollercoaster ride because when you're just started you don't really have a lot going on, so you really want to get involved, want to learn different skill sets. Once you have a connection, your network is built up, then you're getting recognized. Then you actually start to do all the extra things. So you do kind of go through this kind of plateau, but then you just keep going up, but you have to set a boundary like David saying that you can't just keep taking on more than you can chew. That's where I am at this point, but it is hard to say no, especially if it's something that you're really passionate about. And it feels like it's very hard to say no to a great opportunity, but a lot of the time you just have to prioritize. I know for some colleagues of mine, when it really does happen what one thing they did is to go part time for their graduate program. So that they can take on this amazing opportunity for a very short period of time. So there are things you have to compromise, because otherwise you just, you're just not going to get anything at all.

[Louis Colaruotolo]

I want to add a note that I think was a very important that not only David but also Sharon noted on, is the amazing and wonderful power of the word no. It is a word that we don't use a lot. There are so many books out there written about the power of yes, but the power of no is incredibly important and I think a lot of us to some degree, have experienced burnout, just burnout beyond our own level of control. Right now I should be writing my proposal. Is it due in two days? Yes. What am I doing? Not that. So I chose to do this event because this was something that I wanted to do. You know it wasn't something I felt I needed to do, but I thought it was an interesting opportunity. I said no to a few other opportunities along the way and I was able to hone down on the things that I really wanted to do, but also things that I thought would be beneficial to me in the long run.

[Teresa Crease]

And as a long term faculty member and now member of senior administration, I can assure you that the ability to say no will serve you well for the rest of your career because it doesn't

get better. It only gets worse, so good do because you, and again even now myself, if somebody asked me to be on another committee or do another special project you want to do a good job, you want to be helpful, be a team player, but at some point you learn you need to learn to say no for your own sanity and well being. So it is definitely a skill to learn to cultivate. And again, you have to pick your battles, your nos, the ones that aren't going to, I guess, disadvantage you in terms of your academic obligation, you have to prioritize, and sometimes you just have to let something go. So yeah, definitely a skill that you need to cultivate over the years.

[Sharon Wang]

Yeah I absolutely agree. And there is also there is a draft... sorry, I don't know how to say the first name, I am really sorry, but yeah, I think that's something I have to have in my draft is it's a very well formulated email template to say no to things.

[Travis Francis]

What Sharon is referring to is something Emmanuelle had put in the chat. This is something that I was told to have a draft email in my inbox that goes like this. It is nice of you to think of me. I have a number of things going on my plate right now with my new position as blank atop of my research program, which makes for a busy schedule these days. Because of this, I'm not taking on any new commitments at this time. Thank you for the invitation though, I do appreciate it.

And I think that's really beneficial for all of us to have, because if we don't, if we're not prepared and it's just thrown at us, I think our first instinct is to say yes without actually thinking about it. So if we have something like this ready to go, then we can think through our options a little bit more thoroughly.

[Anita Luu]

Helpful as well, just to say, can I have a couple days to think about it and get back to you? Their knee jerk reaction is to maybe just say yes right away or we live in the society where we feel like we have to respond right away. So maybe even giving yourself like 2 days and just say like I'll get back to you by the end of the week or something might be helpful because then you could actually think like should I really take on another thing on top of my five other things and the answer is probably no, but you probably want to say yes right away just to be helpful. But, you have to think about what serves you and like what you want to do in the future and what you can handle and then decide accordingly, I think.

[Sharon Wang]

Yeah, so it turns out we need lessons on negotiation skills. That's about that.

[David Said]

So but Teri, I think at the next workshop that you should organize is a workshop on saying how to say no. But to Anita's point and Sharon's as well, is I think, yeah, saying no is difficult for a number of reasons and I personally find one of the challenges I have is my emails go right to my phone, and I treat my emails, and I've convinced myself over the last three years that emails are like social media notifications. If it comes to your phone, you know why are you not going to, you know you're going to open it. You know you want to click and you know we want to know what's going on or what kind of questions or issues you're dealing with. And I realized the time spent answering my notifications, my notifications through my email inbox in my phone has put me in a position where I have to respond so quickly to anyone and

anything about anything. And yeah, that's the exact opposite of saying no, saying no, it's not just at least what I'm learning from this conversation is it's not just a physical sense of saying no. It's removing the mechanisms that will allow you not to say no. So, maybe it might be useful, I just recently removed or silenced the notifications on my email from my phone, so I'm finding that to be helpful as well.

[Sharon Wang]

I got into a rabbit hole awhile ago is to check my phone first thing and then I ended up spending like 2 hours answering emails. Do not do that. Do not do that.

[Travis Francis]

So what other questions do you guys have for our wonderful panel? OK, well if there's no other questions, I just wanted to say thanks to all of our presenters. This was a great session. There were some really good, definitely something that each one of us can take away and apply to our daily lives as graduate students, and eventually people that are going to want to find a job. So with that I will hand it over to Dr. Crease to send us off.

[Teresa Crease]

So I just want to reiterate what Travis said. Thank you to the six of you. I think all the talks were awesome and we did have some good discussions afterwards. So we do really appreciate you all taking the time to do this because you, as you said, you have other things you could be doing, so the fact that you put this, kept this on your list was gratifying.

Again to the audience, if you hopefully will fill out the exit survey. As I said, we're hoping the goal is to make this an annual event. And of course we always want to make things better. It would be nice at some point if we could do things like this in person and so in the meantime, we're kind of restricted to the online format, but know that we're looking to the future to eventually we'll be able to come back on campus, so please do tell us what you liked and what you didn't like or felt like was missing or could have been better, and we are happy to take your input. The survey is anonymous, I think, Travis you can correct me if I'm wrong, there's a draw for something and I think that's separate, so you can feel free to tell us what you really think and we will take that information to heart when we try to organize the same or a similar conference for next year.

So again, thank you all and I wish you the best for the rest of this semester and beyond, and hopefully you've taken away some good ideas and thoughts from the whole conference that you can apply. So thanks everyone for attending.

[Travis Francis]

One last thing I want to mention is at the end of the survey you're given the option if you want to receive a certificate of completion. So if you want to receive one of those, go through the exit survey and just add in your email so we know who to send it to. Thanks again. See you guys.

[David Said]

Bye, thank you so much Associate Dean Crease and Travis.

[Teresa Crease]

Well, we had a team of, I don't know, six or seven. I think I thanked everyone on the first day, but as you said David, I think these kind of events take a lot of planning. Two people can't do it by themselves. We had to wrangle all the speakers and then the organization. Thanks to

Zach who is our conference services contact who's been lurking in the background making sure it's all working the way it's supposed to. So thanks to Zach and lots of people, there's a lot of moving parts for something like this so yeah, I think it went well and we're glad you all came.

[End of Transcript]