



# Career Planning for Mid-Stage PhD Students

## Part 1: Professional Self-Assessments

**Steve Lee, PhD**  
The CLIMB Program  
Assistant Director  
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## Let's start with a story

### Mary and John: grad students at Northwestern

- What would you do in this situation?
- How would you go about making your decision? What would be your decision-making process?
- Who would you ask for help, advice, support, etc?

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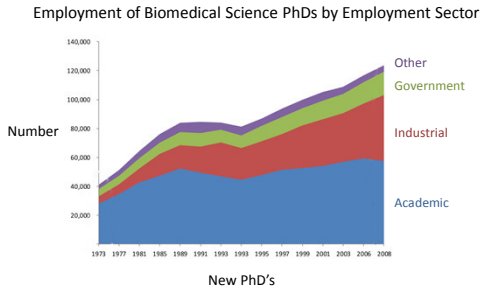
## We'll address these topics:

- 1. Intro to Career Planning**
  - o professional self-assessments
- 2. Exploring Options**
  - o informational interviews
  - o resources and options for NU PhD students
- 3. Building Relationships**
  - o networking for extroverts and introverts
  - o managing your online profile; branding
- 4. Panel Discussion**
  - o NU professionals with PhDs in the sciences
  - o Discussions on how they explored options

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## What's the current job market like?

Employment of Biomedical Science PhDs by Employment Sector



Number

Other  
Government  
Industrial  
Academic

New PhD's

What implications does this have for your career?

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## What are employers seeking?

2011 national study: "What's important for new graduates?"


**employers** → **discipline knowledge**  
**alumni** → **technical skills**  
**faculty** → **professional soft skills**  
**students** → **professional soft skills**

**discipline knowledge**  
**technical skills**  
**professional soft skills**  
communication  
decision making  
self-management  
teamwork  
professionalism  
leadership

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## How do employers perceive PhD job seekers?

- over educated
- only interested in academia
- overly theoretical, not practical
- unaware of deadlines
- lack of communication skills
- anti-social
- too casual



**Prepare to combat these misconceptions.**

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## What do you bring as a PhD?

- able to support a position with evidence and logic
- able to conceive and design complex studies
- implement and manage all phases of complex projects
- apply scientific method to test and organize ideas
- combine and integrate info from disparate sources
- teaching skills: conceptualizing, explaining
- public speaking
- able to evaluate critically **You bring many valuable skills with your PhD!**
- problem solving
- able to work with ambiguity

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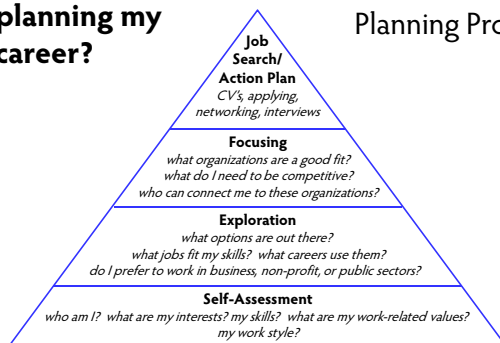
## Does career planning work?

- Thinking about goals motivates people to pursue them.
- Developing specific, rather than general goals, helps people to achieve them.
- Developing and implementing strategies to pursue career goals leads to:
  - higher salaries
  - promotions
  - more responsibility
  - greater satisfaction

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## How do I start planning my career?

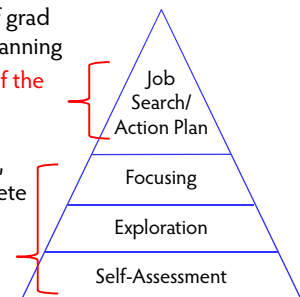
### Peter Fiske's Career Planning Process



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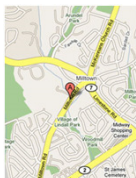
## Be aware of 2 common mistakes

- Waiting until the end of grad school to start career planning
  - seeing only the tip of the iceberg
- Analyzing and planning, but afraid to take concrete steps
  - analysis paralysis



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## A professional self-assessment asks: "Where you are now?"



- Your professional "road map"
  - Where are you now?
  - What are your strengths and skills?
  - What have been your past experiences?
  - Where do you want to go?
- Use professional assessment tools:
  - Myers-Briggs personality types
  - Strengths Finder
  - Strong Interest Inventory
  - What Color is Your Parachute?



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## Why do I need a self-assessment? Don't I know myself?

- In a Gallup survey: 97% said their leadership skills are at or above average (!)
  - Many don't assess their strengths accurately
- It's critical to develop your metacognitive skills
  - ability to *identify* and *regulate* your strengths, weaknesses, emotions, motivations, etc
  - within yourself *and* with others

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## As you assess yourself, plan for **goals** and **growth**.

### Goals

- specific
- short-term
- task-oriented

### Growth

- overall
- long-term
- process-oriented

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## Work on one of the self- assessment exercises in handout

Write down and record your answers.

The goal from these exercises is to discover your strengths:

$$\text{strength} = \text{skill} + \text{joy}$$

Complete the other exercises on your own later.

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## Resources

- *Please Understand Me II* by David Keirsey
  - a variation of the Myers-Briggs test to assess communication preferences
- *Strengths Based Leadership* by Rath and Conchie
  - the StrengthsFinder self-assessment tool
- *What Color is Your Parachute?* by Richard Bolles
  - the "bible" of career planning
- NU University Career Services
  - Kamilah McCoy – Grad Student Services

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# CLIMB

Collaborative Learning and  
Integrated Mentoring  
in the Biosciences

The CLIMB Program

[www.northwestern.edu/climb/](http://www.northwestern.edu/climb/)

Steve Lee, PhD; Assistant Director

[stevenlee@northwestern.edu](mailto:stevenlee@northwestern.edu)

## Career Planning for Mid-Stage PhD Students Workshop #1: Introduction to Career Planning and Self-Assessments



### Introductory Story for Discussion:

Mary and her husband John were feeling squeezed by their financial situation. Both are almost done with their PhD's at Northwestern, and want to start a family soon, but they are worried that they would not have enough money to live comfortably with children in Chicago. Recently, a sales rep visiting Mary's lab told her about a newly available Field Applications and Sales Scientist position at his company (a major microscope vendor). In their discussion, he happened to mention that she could double her current salary in that role, so she was naturally intrigued. Mary applied for the job, got an interview, and was offered the position. With strong encouragement from her husband, she was about to accept the offer when she began to have second thoughts:

- "Sure the money is going to be nice but how will I balance future childcare issues with the extensive travel required in that job?"
- "I initially chose biomedical research to make an impact on my field, work on cutting edge medical questions, and maybe even make a real difference in peoples' lives. Will I be able to realize those goals in this new position?"
- "This Field Apps/Sales position has a base-salary-plus-commission salary structure. The people I met during my interviews all seemed money motivated. I mean, they all seemed really happy with their jobs and everything, but they sure talked a lot about the extra hours they spent working to meet their sales goals. Money is important, but I don't think I want to work SO many hours, away from my family, in order to make a higher level of sales and get that extra commission."

Mary realized that she might not find this position so satisfying after all.

### Discuss these questions within your small group:

- What would you do in this situation?
- How would you go about making your decision? What would be your decision-making process?
- Who would you ask for help, advice, support, etc?

(adapted from "Work-Related Values: What is Important to You?" by B. Lindstaedt, P. Clifford, C. Fuhrmann, and J. Hobin; <http://myIDP.sciencecareers.org>)

## Self-Assessment Exercise #1: The Seven Stories Exercise

(adapted from these sources: The Five O’Clock Club; Richard Bolles’ “What Color is Your Parachute?”; and Jane Hyun’s “Breaking the Bamboo Ceiling”)

**Individual activity:** Write seven stories from different parts of your life: work, from your youth, your school years, your early career up to the present. Don’t forget volunteer work, your hobbies and your personal life. *Each story should focus on something that you enjoyed doing and in which you did it well.*

Starting with your first story, write a paragraph about each accomplishment. Then find out what your accomplishments have in common. If you are having trouble doing the exercises, ask a friend to help you talk them through. Some friends can be more objective and will probably point out strengths you never realized.

You will probably be surprised. For example, you may be especially good interacting with people, but it’s something you’ve always done and therefore take for granted. This may be a thread that runs through your life and may be one of your motivated skills. It *may* be that you’ll be unhappy in a career that doesn’t allow you to deal with people.

When I did the Seven Stories Exercise, one of the first stories I listed was from when I was 10 years old, when I wrote a play to be put on by the kids in the neighborhood. I rehearsed everyone, sold tickets to the adults, and served cookies and milk with the proceeds. You might say that my direction as a *general manager*—running the whole show, thinking things up, getting everybody working together—was set in the fourth grade. I saw these traits over and over again in each of my stories.

It is important to realize that the Seven Stories Exercise will not tell you exactly which career you should have, but the elements to look for in a career that you will find satisfying. You’ll have a range to consider, and you’ll know the elements you must have to keep you happy. Once you’ve selected a few career possibilities that might satisfy you, talk to people in those fields to find out if a particular field or industry is really what you want, and the possibilities for someone with your experience. That’s one way to test if your aspirations are realistic.

**Analyzing your seven stories:** try to look for the patterns that run through them so that you will know the things you do well that also give you satisfaction. Some of the questions below sound similar. That’s okay. They are a catalyst to make you think more deeply about the experience. For now, simply go through each story without trying to force it to come out any particular way. Just think hard about yourself. And be as honest as you can. When you have completed this analysis, the words in the next exercise may help you think of additional things.

For each story, answer these questions:

1. What was your initial goal or purpose? What was the context?
2. Was there a particular hurdle, problem, or constraint? Identify them.
3. Who else was involved in the story? What role did you play in relation to the others?
4. What did you enjoy the most? What made you the most proud? What did you love?
5. What motivated you? What prompted you?
6. What did you do best? What skills did you demonstrate? How did you demonstrate those skills? What did you do specifically?
7. What did you accomplish? What goals did you achieve? What were the positive results?

**Group activity:** Within your small group, have each person share one story that they wrote. Ask each other questions to better understand their stories, and to work through the analysis. Begin to share about the patterns and commonalities within your stories. If you have a friend within your group whom you know well, you may feel free to suggest other patterns or strengths that they haven't mentioned yet.

## Self-Assessment Exercise #2: Your Forty-Year Vision

(by Kate Wendleton, President, The Five O'Clock Club)

If you could imagine your ideal life five years from now, what would it be like? How would it be different from the way it is now? If you made new friends during the next five years, what would they be like? Where would you be living? What would your hobbies and interests be? How about 10 years from now? Twenty? Thirty? Forty? Dream about your future.

Some people feel locked in by their present circumstances. Many say it is too late for them. But a lot can happen in 5, 10, 20, 30, or 40 years. Reverend King had a dream. His dream helped all of us, but his dream helped him too. He was living according to a vision (which he thought was God's plan for him). *It gave him a purpose in life.* Most successful people have a vision.

A lot can happen to you over the next few decades—and a lot of what happens is up to you. If you see the rest of your life as boring, I'm sure you will be right. Some people pick the "sensible" route or the one that fits in with how others see them, rather than the one that is best for them.

On the other hand, you can come up with a few scenarios of how your life could unfold. In that case, you will have to do a lot of thinking and a lot of research to figure out which path makes most sense for you and will make you happiest.

**Individual activity:** Write down, in the present tense, the way your life is right now, and the way you see yourself at each of the time frames listed, up to 40 years from now. This exercise should take about an hour. Allow your unconscious to tell you what you will be doing in the future. Just quickly comment on each of the questions listed on the following page, and then move on to the next.

Start the exercise with the way things are now so you will be realistic about your future. Now, relax and have a good time going through the years. Don't think too hard. Let's see where you wind up. You have plenty of time to get things done.

1. The year is \_\_\_\_\_ (current year). You are \_\_\_\_\_ years old right now.

- Tell me what your life is like right now. (Say anything you want about your life as it is now.)
- Who are your friends? What do they do for a living?
- What is your relationship with your family, however you define "family"?
- Are you married? Single? Children? (list their ages)
- Where are you living? What does it look like?
- What are your hobbies and interests?
- What do you do for exercise?
- How is your health?
- How do you take care of your spiritual needs?

- What kind of work are you doing?
- What else would you like to note about your life right now?
- Don't worry if you don't like everything about your life right now. Most people do this exercise because they want to improve themselves. They want to *change* something. What do *you* want to change?

2. The year is xxxx (current year + 5). You are \_\_\_\_\_ years old. (Add 5 to present age.)

- Use the same questions as above

*Continue the exercise for every 5 years, up to 40 years from now*

You have plenty of time to get done everything you want to do. Imagine wonderful things for yourself. You have plenty of time. Get rid of any “negative programming.” For example, if you imagine yourself having poor health because your parents suffered from poor health, see what you can do about that. It's your life—your only one. As they say, “This is the real thing. It's not a rehearsal.”

**Group activity:** Within your small group, have each person share one aspect of their vision. Ask each other questions to better understand their visions, and to work through the questions. Are there aspects of other people's visions that you wish to incorporate into your own? or wish to avoid? Sharing your visions may help to sharpen your dreams and goals. Discuss the patterns and commonalities within your visions. If you have a friend within your group whom you know well, you may feel free to suggest other ideas for their future that they haven't mentioned yet.

### Self-Assessment Exercise #3: myIDP

Individual Development Plans (IDPs) were first introduced for postdocs for their career planning. But they've become so useful so that graduate programs are using them too.

myIDP provides:

- Exercises to help you examine your skills, interests, and values
- A list of 20 scientific career paths with a prediction of which ones best fit your skills and interests
- A tool for setting strategic goals for the coming year, with optional reminders to keep you on track
- Articles and resources to guide you through the process

Individual activity: start here: <http://myidp.sciencecareers.org/>

Group activity:

- Discuss within your group: what did you learn about yourself?
- Go back to the story with Mary and John. Does working through this IDP help to define your questions and decision-making process of how you might face their situation?

### Self-Assessment Exercise #4: Myers-Briggs Type Indicators

For a free, unofficial version, start here: <http://www.humanmetrics.com/cgi-win/jtypes2.asp>