

Molecular and Cell Biology (MCB) Department at the University of California Berkeley

MCB Grad Network (MGN)

3rd year event summary

In mid-Fall, a faculty-free “Fireside Chat” is held for 3rd year students who have passed their qualifying exams and are entering the long stretch where the exciting newness of graduate school dies off and the hard, slow grind of pursuing your thesis research sets in. This is also the time when cohorts have fewer or no organized events together, increasing the risk of isolation. In the first 45 minutes, a panel frankly discusses mentor/PI issues, the sh*t they didn’t tell you, and work-life balance. Next, everyone grabs lunch and divides up into small breakout discussion groups of 6-8 people each, with 1 to 2 MGN members as discussion leaders.

General topics covered during 3rd year panel discussion:

- Who is your mentor? Who is your PI? Are they the same?
- Who do you go to when you can’t talk to your PI?
- How do you develop/maintain a good relationship with your PI?
- How do you discuss expectations? Did you do that before you joined and now they’ve changed? Did yours change or did theirs?
- How do you express your grievances with them?
- When PIs are focused on getting a paper out, when are they focused on your career?
- How and when do you bring up career preparations? Especially if you aren’t interested in academia?
- What career development moves have you made? Funding, fellowships, conferences, supplemental activities?
- Are you utilizing your thesis committee? They are supposed to be there to guide you, not just your jury on your scientific progress. What’s your communication with them like?
- What if you’re worried you joined the wrong lab? How do you take a leave? How do you switch? Is it better to just leave the program?
- What do you do when it gets bad? When was the hardest time and what did you do?
- What helped you rebalance and get back on track?
- Did you wait too long? What held you back from getting help?
- How have you balanced the outside family and friend relationships?
- What was key to keeping yourself together inside and out of campus?

General topics covered during 3rd year breakout group discussions:

1. Mentors/PI relationship: Finding mentors, Communication
2. Lab life: Funding, fellowships, conferences, travel grants, moving your project forward, thesis committee, switching projects, switching labs, taking leave of absence, managing relationships with lab mates
3. Everyone to cover **Imposter Syndrome**.
4. Life outside of lab: Relationships (i.e. family, romantic), physical health, mental/spiritual health, work-life balance, stress, substance abuse, depression, anxiety, finances, living arrangements, legal situations, personal or family emergencies
5. Career Development: Supplemental education/activities

Molecular and Cell Biology (MCB) Department at the University of California Berkeley

MCB Grad Network (MGN)

Survey:

- 1) Did you attend? [yes or no]
- 2) Would you be interested in attending a less formal gathering (i.e. mixer) with the same group in the future? [yes or no]
- 3) What was useful about the fireside chat? Do you have any suggestions on how to improve it? [Free response]
- 4) Do you have any other ideas for improving the department that could be tackled by a student group? [Free response]