Finding, Establishing and Maintaining Productive Research Collaborations

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Collaborations

• Certainly, most people do have them
• If you came from a large laboratory, you probably collaborated with a fellow graduate student or postdoc
• Sometimes, however, even when coming from a large lab, there are no “intramural” collaborations
• Has anyone here not collaborated with another investigator before?
  --it is OK if you have not
Collaborations—advantages:

• Long gone are the days in which one person is lone in their field
• You can’t know everything
• Collaborators contribute expertise you do not have
• You learn from them
  --but, they also learn from you
• Productivity can have more breadth and work could be published more quickly
How do you find people to collaborate with?

• Seminars that people give
  --here or elsewhere

• Literature

• Colleagues make a suggestion
  --thus, you need to talk to your colleagues!
  --this includes me—that’s part of my job!

• What if you are the only one here who works in your field?
How do you find people to collaborate with? #2

- Scientific meetings
- A manuscript (or grant) you reviewed
  --someone with complementary interests
  --you have to be very careful so that there is no concern you are “stealing ideas”
- Study section colleagues
  --their own research could complement yours
  --they often suggest people at their institutions
- When you give seminars (here and elsewhere)
Making contact:

• Email (IUSM/IUPUI or outside)
• Phone (does anybody use this ancient communication device anymore?)
• Meet face-to-face
  --scientific meeting (outside person) or at their office (faculty here or close by)
• Video conferencing (e.g., Skype)
  --when distance is an issue, but you still want the semblance of a face-to-face meeting
Collaborations—disadvantages:

• Whose efforts are the greatest (i.e., most) in publications?
• Who should be first/corresponding author?
• Is this a new area for you?
  --it can be an advantage OR a disadvantage
• Will this help you take your research program to the next level?
  --it can be an advantage OR a disadvantage
• You are at their mercy for when their experiments are completed
Things to agree to upfront:

• How frequently should you meet to discuss collaborative data?
• Who will be the corresponding author(s)?
• How will you divide responsibilities?
• Will graduate students and/or postdocs be participating?
• Who will be first author(s) on the first (and subsequent) papers?
• Who will present the work at national and international meetings?
Collaborative grants:

• How do you decide on which funding agency to go for?
• How to divide grant writing responsibilities?
• Timeline
  --you must agree--and stick to it
  --this can be hard if you are junior and at the mercy of a more established investigator
• Who contributes what preliminary data?
  --that really depends on focus of grant
• Who is PI? Co-PI? Multiple PIs?
Best way to maintain a collaboration:

- Both of you receive recognition and benefits for the work
- You are both productive and get along
- Trainees receive appropriate credit
  --and feel that they have
- Both of you present the work and recognize the contributions of your collaborator during seminars
- The results of your studies become increasingly interesting to you both
Questions and Myths:

• If I collaborate with a senior investigator, will I look independent enough for promotion and tenure (P & T)?
• If I am a multi-PI on an NIH (or NSF) grant with a senior investigator, how does this look for my P & T?
• If I do not have grants that are solely my own, I will not look sufficiently independent.
• If I am a co-corresponding author with someone more senior, I will not have an emerging national reputation for my research.
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What is considered in P & T for researchers?

• For an Assistant going up for promotion to Associate Professor…
  --emerging national recognition
  →publications, presentations, etc.
  --funding for your research program

• For an Associate going up to Full Professor…
  --Sustained national recognition
  --Emerging international recognition
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Multiple PIs on a grant?

• The NIH now allows this
  --all PIs receive equal credit
  --is this “double-dipping”?

• The NSF has been doing this longer and strongly encourages this
  --allows junior PIs to develop throughout the course of the grant
  --Delineation of effort needs to be clearly described
  --Do P & T definitions need to change?
Do P & T rules need to change to account for this?

• Not necessarily
• What is “success” for research faculty?
• What is “independence” in the context of one’s research program?
• Can collaborative research be viewed as a synergistic interaction between productive “independent” investigators?
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Can you demonstrate emerging national recognition by your collaborative efforts with an established investigator?

• No matter what, you **need** to demonstrate that you had an essential role as an independent force/voice in the collaboration

• The collaborator can direct some inquiries s/he received as a “corresponding author” to you
  --e.g., the question involves your area(s) of expertise in the collaboration
Can you demonstrate emerging national recognition by your collaborative efforts with an established investigator? #2

- Your collaborator suggests that you (rather than him or her) give an invited talk on the research at a national meeting
- You are directly invited to give the talk
  --this happens particularly if you know the meeting organizer/session chair
- Co-write a review article on your collaborative work
  --you are both corresponding authors
What are the risks as a junior person if I collaborate with a senior investigator?

• You are diluted responsibility- and credit-wise
• After the first paper or two, the other party decides to pursue the work…
  --without you
• You decide that you do not like collaborating with this person…
  --but s/he still wants to
• They pursue the work without your knowledge
  --very unusual and highly unlikely
Advice for faculty establishing and maintaining a productive collaboration...

• If you do not know them, find out—ask people who know or have collaborated with them in the past
  --probably best to do this discretely (or as matter-of-fact)

• Be very positive

• Fulfill your end of the “bargain”

• Ideally, it will become a very productive, long-term collaboration

• Make it a good two-way street…
Establishing collaborations with investigators OUTSIDE of your area...

• This can be a very productive collaborative relationship
• “Low-hanging” fruit
• Bringing two distinct but potentially complementary areas together to attack an important, previously unstudied area
How do you maintain a productive research collaboration?

• Do your fair part
• Communicate…
  --regularly
• Learn all you can…
  --contribute all you can
• But, don’t let yourself get stepped on
• Appreciate the opportunity to grow/mature as an investigator
• Take your work to the next level…
Other’s experiences to share…
Additional questions?

Please fill out the evaluations and hand in as you leave

Thank you for attending…
Additional Feedback?

Let me know your ideas/other thoughts on this topic

Every little bit helps you AND your colleagues
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