How to Advocate for … Research Opportunities and Experiences

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What is your positionality?

I am Latinx, a first-generation immigrant of color, and the first person in my immediate family to attend school in the United States.

What kinds of experiences or opportunities can graduate students obtain in research?

Graduate students can gain a wide range of opportunities in research, including experience with the initial procedures of studies, such as conducting literature reviews, identifying possible variables to examine, assisting with the development of protocols or recruitment efforts, and completing Institutional Review Board applications. Graduate students could also participate in data collection, management, coding, and analysis, as well as preparation of manuscripts for publication and presentation materials for conferences at the local, regional, and national levels.

What advice would you offer fellow graduate students on joining a research team?

Investigate what research your institution and specific program has done or is currently engaged in, examine what relates to your area of interest, and reach out to the professors leading teams producing that research. When approaching professors about research opportunities, be thorough regarding your interests, previous research experiences, and aspirations, as this may help inform the professor of the type of role you could potentially occupy in the team.

Another piece of advice would be to share those interests and aspirations with peers and colleagues from other departments on campus, with whom you may collaborate in some capacity. For instance, sharing your interests with your graduate assistantship supervisors may pave the way for new initiatives, and sharing with doctoral students may open up the opportunity to assist in dissertation research procedures.

Lastly, I would generally emphasize the importance of communicating passionately about topics and populations of interest and showing a genuine desire to learn from others and contribute to the literature and field, as doing so can facilitate meaningful collaborations with like-minded folks.

How does one navigate the dynamics of a research team (e.g., when to advocate for a leading role)?
Navigating research team dynamics will likely be a nuanced experience; however, in any team, having early and honest conversations about roles and expectations is vital. Additionally, when seeking to partake in a leading role, it is essential to show initiative, explicitly communicate your ideas and proposals for the project, and follow through with tasks after advocating for yourself to avoid appearing as a passive or unreliable participant and being perceived as such within the team.

Assertiveness throughout projects’ completion and beyond is also needed, particularly when approaching leaders about authorship for the content or desires to showcase work at events or in publications. In situations where your contributions were not significant enough to achieve those recognitions, it is important to be willing to work with other team members to reach a better understanding of what would be needed (e.g., completing additional work) to gain that recognition and support.

**What advice would you offer fellow first-generation, international graduate students of color and those who support them in gaining research opportunities and experiences?**

There can be a great amount of self-doubt and feelings of not belonging associated with being a student with one or more minoritized identities trying to navigate research opportunities in graduate school, particularly when you are not surrounded by others of a similar background or folks who honor those identities and view them as the assets they are.

My recommendations for those students and those who support them would be to search for or build a peer support network to connect with other students of minoritized backgrounds, discuss challenges, share resources, help each other solve problems, and provide encouragement. Support networks can be within your program or institution or outside of them (e.g., online communities) and are a great reminder that we are not alone.

Also, seek mentorship, preferably from a researcher who has navigated a similar experience and can offer feedback and recommendations accounting for factors others may not consider. If seeking to support first-generation, international graduate students of color, become a mentor and continue to open doors for others so that one day the literature and perspectives shared within it are more diverse and representative of those we research and serve.

Lastly, remember and remind others that folks from minoritized backgrounds not only belong in research but that our contributions are needed and can help drive the field forward.

**Resource: The Basics of Research as a Graduate Student**
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