Grace Hopper 2012 Mentoring for Diversity Panel
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Followup Questions

Followup Questions (not addressed during panel)

At this conference, I've heard the idea of creating a "board of directors" for yourself - basically having several mentors serving different purposes (don't worry, no mandatory board meetings!) I'm thinking about developing my own "board" and am wondering how many / what types of mentors you have had?
- ML: That's a great idea. I can't say I've used this idea myself, but I am vaguely aware of some junior colleagues who appear to have made me a member of their boards. It's probably not a bad idea to have folks to advise you on career advancement, teaching, grantsmanship, and research. I would not suggest that you specifically avoid asking person A about topic B. But, it is a good idea to pick mentors without having to feel like you need to find one person who can help with everything in your life.
- MdJ: I don't think I was ever quite that deliberative about building my mentor network. I almost think that the "board of directors" approach might be a bit limiting in some ways -- for me, I've always found it more useful to just meet a lot of people and try to think about who will give me the most valuable advice on Topic X. I do think it's helpful to be proactive in seeking out mentoring, but I also think it's important to recognize that most people who are good mentors are also *really* busy, so you need to be smart about how you use them -- be as specific as possible about what you want. At UMBC specifically, I have mentors within the department to ask about politics, research areas, and how worthwhile/important different service opportunities are. I have mentors outside the department to help me plan longer-term how to be visible to the broader campus community, how to manage my time, how to balance work and personal responsibilities, how to navigate the tenure process how to deal with difficult people. I have mentors at other institutions who I ask about career pathways, funding opportunities, professional service, managing student researchers, and finding connections for new collaborations. But I would be hard pressed to give you a "list of my mentors" -- they are many and varied!

I sometimes feel like I'm taking advantage of the patience and supportiveness of my spouse... what are some things you've done/seen done to be able to let your partner know they're as important as your work?
- ML: We try to remember to explicitly say thank you and to show appreciation. Asking about each other's work and really caring about the answer seems to go a long way. Trying to "divide and conquer" on the annoying tasks that no one wants to do also seems important.
- MdJ: I am much more organized (but also much more overcommitted) than my spouse, so I often send him a "schedule for next week" email on Friday or so to make sure he

knows who's doing what. I also started a family Google calendar this year, which has been fairly helpful (especially as my kids get older and need to start managing their own schedules more and more).

I try a mixed mentoring style: weekly meetings and walking in. But then students are completely startled when I walk in. So is this a bad idea?

- ML: Depends how you walk in, I guess.
- MdJ: I think Michael's right. If you're giving them the impression that you're "checking up on them," that could be the problem. I go into my lab a lot (there's a fridge in there, and a shared printer that we all use). Sometimes it leads to advising conversations; sometimes it's just a brief socializing opportunity; sometimes I just walk in and out without saying hi. Maybe if you have more reasons to just drop in casually, it wouldn't always be a "time to report out!" moment that makes them feel stressed out. Personally, I have almost always had weekly meetings with all of my advisees (length has varied; these days they're half-hour meetings). I've also tried the "research office hours" that I think Carla mentioned, especially when I have a LOT of students and find myself with too many time splinters (somebody only needs 5-10 minutes and you waste 20-25 minutes waiting for the next meeting). It depends on the semester, where everybody is in their progress, how many students I have, etc. I also usually have larger project meetings for a couple of more collaborative projects, and those are usually where I see the undergraduates (rather than meeting with them individually).

Should you do tasks well, even if you said "no" initially and then were forced to do them nevertheless?

- ML: Yes, of course. Would you really *choose* to do a poor job? The solution to getting tapped too often doing things you are good at but don't want to do is (1) to say no reasonably and fairly (without angst or aggression) and (2) if forced to do it anyway, try to make sure you are getting something concrete in return---a preferred class assignments or some flexibility or to go to the back of the list for future dirty jobs.
- AD: I agree with ML. If there are reasons why you can't do the full task to the degree that you'd like (or think is expected), be up front about what you can/can't do, so that everyone is in agreement about what it means for the task to get done.
- MdJ: I would not be able to bring myself to *not* do a task well. But that doesn't mean you have to *overdo* it, which I think many of us tend to do. If you're asked to put together a summary of the degree requirements for your peer institutions because your undergrad committee is doing a curriculum review, it's enough to find the requirements, print out the appropriate pages, and collate them into a PDF. You don't have to produce a gee-whiz powerpoint presentation with spreadsheets and charts (unless, of course, you think that will be useful and *you really care about it* -- but if you had to be forced to do it, presumably that's not the case). Also, I will sometimes make a point to *not* do certain tasks too quickly (or if I do them quickly, not to send the results out too quickly) because often that will just get you asked to do another task right away.
    I am concerned, though, about the idea that a junior faculty member is being "forced" to do things that they don't think they have time to do. That can be a sign of dysfunction

in your department and you might try to seek out some more local mentoring to understand how to handle the politics of the specific activities that you're getting sucked into.

I am an adjunct faculty with a full-time job at a research lab. I would like to find out what the tenure-track faculty perception of adjunct faculty is. Also, what would you recommend for an adjunct faculty to enhance their career in academia?
- ML: Adjuncts are becoming more and more common and are becoming more and more depended upon. As a department chair, I always tried to view the adjuncts in the "separate but equal" sort of way---their concerns are not the same as regular faculty and pretending they are can lead to bad feelings on both sides, BUT adjuncts are very important to the overall departmental ecosystem and their concerns and needs should be taken seriously. That being said, there are definitely faculty members who treat any non-faculty member (student, administrator, staff, adjunct) with a degree of condescension. Try not to let those folks get you down, unless they are your boss, in which case consider working elsewhere.
- MdJ: I think Michael is right that some faculty really look down on adjuncts (and on *anybody* who doesn't satisfy their mental model of an Important Person). Luckily, those are not usually people who are closely involved with teaching, undergraduate curriculum, etc. Focus on the people who value your presence in the department. If you're interested in possibly moving into a full-time position at your current institution or elsewhere, be sure that you're (a) as actively as possible doing the things that would make you highly qualified for such a position (whether it's publishing, writing grant proposals, mentoring, journal reviewing, or whatever) and (b) letting people in the department know that you're doing those things (offer to give a departmental seminar, collaborate with people in the department, put blurbs about your activities in the departmental newsletter).

Can you speak to moving between industry and academia and the challenges therein?
- ML: I went from industry to grad school to academia to industry to academia. I was very fortunate that my group in industry was highly academic. (When the group disbanded, every single member landed a plum academic job.) It's tough in general, though. It's important to keep publishing and staying engaged in the community or academic opportunities are unlikely to materialize.
- AD: I made the switch from industry to academia as well. Like ML, I was fortunate that my industry job was fairly academic (where, by "academic", I mean research-focused). If you're interested in moving to a teaching institution, getting some experience with teaching (say, by being an adjunct) is a great way to signal to future academic employers that you're genuinely committed to teaching and have a clear sense of what it involves.
- MdJ: After I got my PhD, I went to a research lab (SRI International) for 10 years before i went into academia. I think the reasons that I was very competitive for academic positions are that I had continued to do research and publish (though not at the level expected in academia) and that I had written many successful grant proposals. I had

also been very active in professional service (program committees, chairing workshops, journal reviewing, mentoring activities) and had significant teaching experience in college and grad school. If you are in industry and academia, you should focus on building up your experience in the areas that you're not naturally doing for your current job, since those are potentially going to be viewed as weaknesses by a search committee. Of course, when you do apply, you should really play up your strengths (securing funding, managing budgets, leadership/management experience, giving presentations, etc.)

How do things (priorities, time, etc.) change after tenure?
- ML: I thought the shift was subtle, but there's an expectation for engaging in activities that give more junior people (students, other faculty) opportunities to contribute.
- AD: Definitely what ML said. In addition, many people experience a slow but steady drift into more service. Counterbalancing that are a few things: (1) over time you'll naturally become more efficient at handling various teaching/research tasks, (2) you'll no longer have the mental stresses that come with the tenure process.
- MdJ: I have always liked teaching and service, and having tenure has really freed me to balance those things a little more evenly with research. But I also really wanted to make it to full professor, and I *like* doing research, so things didn't change all that much for me. I have also gotten more involved in leadership activities across campus, which I really enjoy. However, I also seem to spend a *lot* more time in meetings, which I *don't* like, and which I'm trying to get under control.

What does a typical work week look like? I'm sure there's no typical, but give a ballpark approximation.
- MdJ: It varies so much, depending on what you're teaching, where it is in the semester/ break, what proposals/papers you're working on, what meetings you have, and what students you're working with. The job obviously includes teaching, research, and service. So a typical week includes some mix of teaching [lecture/assignment/exam preparation, teaching, office hours, grading], research [thinking about problems, writing code, looking for and reading relevant papers, analyzing data, meeting with students/ groups, writing/revising papers, preparing/giving talks, writing grant proposals], and service [committee meetings, conference/journal reviewing, organizing things of various sorts (workshops, departmental projects, student events)]. The target balance at many universities is 40% teaching, 50% research, 10% service, but this varies a lot from institution to institution, and over time within an institution. Just for yuks (and emphasizing that I'm now a full professor and in a lot more meetings than an assistant prof would normally be), at the end of this document I've added a summary of what this week is/was like for me (note that work and home kind of blur together a lot...).

Is "making things better" through departmental service recognized? How can you make sure your contributions are recognized?
- ML: Taking on leadership roles and coming across as competent and effective is definitely recognized. It doesn't make or break a promotion case, but it's part of the

bigger picture. The more people that are involved, the better the chance it will be noticed.

- AD: Sometimes "making things better" is subtle. Be sure to take opportunities (annual reviews, etc) to be clear about the various contributions you've made. Don't assume that everything you've done has been obvious.
- MdJ: Around tenure time, I started getting better at figuring out how to mention my accomplishments in ways that they would be heard by various authority figures and peers. I realized that forwarding a message about an award or student accomplishment to the chair, a colleague, or a committee in an appropriate context really went a long way towards increasing my "visibility." In retrospect, it would have been smart to do some of that earlier on.

The culture in my department is to conduct a lot of business by email <u>and</u> to respond to emails within one hour if not immediately. For me, it means that if I open my inbox at work, I may spend the whole day answering emails. How can I handle this, so that i have my own work (class prep, meeting students, research) done but am accepted by my department?

- ML: I've seen some people consistently answer email in the evenings. Few things move so quickly that the final outcome will change as a result of this kind of delay.
- AD: I would echo ML's response. If you're concerned that you might miss something urgent by waiting until the evening, set aside some time (say, 30 min) in the middle of the day to do one pass over your latest email, addressing those items that are time-critical.

Women tend to be loyal to their first hire. How do you know when it's time to "jump ship" and move elsewhere? E.g., if getting tenure and turning into one's tenured colleagues is less appealing than not getting tenure?

- ML: Well said. :-)
- AD: Trust yourself to know when the time is right. If you're unhappy and there seems to be no way to fix the situation, or if there's simply another interesting opportunity for you to pursue, then the time is right.

How do you say no to service/mentorship/etc. without feeling guilty/selfish - especially when it is for an underrepresented group or worthy outreach activity?

- ML: I'm terrible at this myself, BUT, the occasional success happens when I remember that it's not usually me that benefits from saying no. It's the folks I've already said yes to who I will let down if I am spread any thinner.
- MdJ: You have to recognize that in the long term, you will accomplish more if you're not overworked (and if you manage your time in a way that enables you to get tenure and move into leadership positions down the road!) Explaining why you are saying no (and if appropriate, the circumstances under which you might say yes in the future) and suggesting other people who might be able to do the job are both good strategies for turning down a request gracefully. "I need to focus more time on my research," "I am overcommitted with other service obligations," and "I don't think I would be able to find

the time to perform this task at the level I think it needs to be done" are all good ways to phrase a turndown, and most people will be sympathetic to these concerns. There is often (but not always) another person who would really like to be invited, and suggesting them can get you double brownie points (from the asker and the eventual invitee) -- think outside the box, since these people may be outside your department or institution, depending on the task.

Questions Addressed at Panel (and my limited memory-based notes)

As a new faculty member, how do I suggest improvements without sounding like I'm criticizing how things were done before?
- Get buy-in from others, especially senior people who are respected and well connected in the department, before making public suggestions. Try to let those more senior people make the actual suggestions, especially if they are controversial. Frame your suggestions in a positive (I wonder if X would help with student retention) rather than a negative (doing Y is terrible) way.
- Be sure you understand the culture of the place, including learning why things are done as they are. In some cases, you'll find that the seemingly odd way things are done actually makes sense if viewed from a broader perspective. In any case, having a fuller understanding will help you better frame your suggestions.

I'm pretty good with my inbox and use the strategy of only keeping emails concerned with tasks that have yet to be completed - but there always seem to be a few ongoing tasks. What's your inbox strategy and how do you get to zero?
- MdJ: Anything I can handle immediately when it comes in (in 5 minutes or less), I try to deal with and delete/file the message right away. Most evenings I spend an hour or two on "mail reduction" to handle things that have piled up during the day and can be dealt with in a slightly longer amount of time (say 10 minutes). Finally, I set aside significant blocks of time every week or two (sometimes more often, sometimes less often) to just focus on processing _all_ of the messages in my inbox. (The first time you do this, especially if you have hundreds or even thousands of accumulated messages, it probably means spending an entire day - maybe two days - doing nothing but email. It's a good activity for right around the end of the semester, or during winter break.) I'll put this as a task on my to-do list and make it a high priority. Anything I can't deal with during that block of time becomes either a task on my short-term or long-term to-do list (and is then filed somewhere appropriate if I'll need the actual message again), _or_ becomes an item I have decided I'm not going to deal with after all. Deciding not to deal with something is very liberating!
- MdJ: Another sometimes useful strategy is to "pass the buck" -- send a message to the person who can do a subtask, send you information, or help you out. (That usually means a new task on my list to close the loop with that person and make sure the subtask actually got done. Unless I don't really care that much, in which case I just delete/file and stop worrying about it.)

As a grad student, there has been a lot of push to work towards getting a faculty position, particularly at a top 10 university. But I have also observed that every untenured/new professor I've met seems stressed out and unhappy. Do you have any comments on that perception and whether it's correct/ Is it something that can be addressed or overcome?

- If you're at a top ten department, then naturally your advisor/peers have an image of "creating people like us" and will pressure you towards that path. But it isn't for everyone, and you should talk to people from many different types of institutions about the expectations - and understand what your strengths and goals are, so that you can decide what is best *for you*.
- It isn't true that all top-10 (or top-20, or top-100, or whatever) faculty are stressed out and unhappy. It is probably true that they are all very busy, but what seems like "unhappy" to you may just be "very busy," and overall they may be quite happy and satisfied. One thing to realize is that even if you end up with a tenure-track position at a top-ten university, getting tenure is not the be-all and end-all if it requires you to spend your time in a way that genuinely makes you unhappy. Focus on worthwhile activities that you think have value to you and the community, and try to be strategic about managing your time and your research - but ultimately you have to live with yourself, and there are always other positions and other opportunities.

With respect to service: Is there a danger to being too good/efficient? It seems like faculty who slack off aren't asked to do as much, so doing well on committees seems like a way to end up on many committees or doing a disproportionate share of the workload.

- MdJ: If you are in a healthy department, you *shouldn't* be asked to do too much pre-tenure. But many of us *choose* to do too much. One way I managed to say "no" at times when I was tempted to say yes was to remind myself that in the long run, I could make a much larger difference if I was successful and got tenure than if I overextended myself with mentoring/service in the short term and wasn't able to succeed in my research and teaching as a result.

How do you negotiate a startup package, and how much should you ask for?

- Make sure you know what is typical in your subarea/institution, and ask for what you need! It's fairly typical to get RA support for 1-2 graduate students for 1-2 years,1-2 months of summer support for 1-2 years, equipment, a reasonable budget for supplies/ publications, and travel money for you and your students.
- MdJ: Other things you may want to consider asking for are TA support in your courses (if that is not typical in your department), control over what classes you teach in your first year or two (may be typical, but isn't always), and additional course releases (depending on the expected course load). Make sure you have everything *in writing* - I know of a few cases where somebody thought they would have a certain course load but it hadn't been put in writing and they were expected to teach more.

What is your advice for surviving tenure and starting a family? When did you decide to start your family and how did you tell your department chair?

- AD: I've heard all sorts of advice like "start a family in grad school; that's when your life is most flexible." or "Wait until after you get tenure" or "do it early in the tenure-track job".... I honestly believe that the "right time" is a very individual decision. I came into my tenure-track job with a two-year-old and a newborn. In many respects, I think my children were helpful in my path to tenure. A tenure-track job shouldn't be a 24/7 effort, and having young children at home forced me to manage my time in such a way that I didn't let the job become 24/7. Spending time with them was generally a great stress-reliever.

Questions Not Directly Related to Panel Topic

How do we decide between academia and industry?

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My question is about how you know whether you should do a postdoc. How do you know if you're ready for a faculty position after a PhD? How do you know that it's not enough and you should look for a postdoc? Can you do two job searches, one after your PhD and again after a postdoc?

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A DAY IN THE LIFE:

Marie's week went like this:

- Monday: stayed off campus! Updated to-do list, prepped two weeks of classes (including 1st draft of exam), set up these panel questions, caught up on email (zero inbox, woo-hoo!), revised reviewing instructions for a conference I'm cochairing, wrote feedback on a student dissertation chapter, did laundry, practiced the piano, drove my daughter to activities.
- Tuesday: meeting with the dean, meeting with colleague about a class he's teaching that I used to teach, College of Engineering staff meeting, class, office hours (busy today - students are panicked before next week's midterm!), picked up daughter, graded a few assignments, sent email to TAs with grading notes for a different assignment, posted handout for class, went out to dinner with husband and daughter, reviewed two third-year review dossiers, wrote reference letter for former student, commented on another dissertation chapter.
- Wednesday: horrific meeting day. Student meeting, project meeting, P&T committee meeting, project meeting, department picnic, Executive Committee meeting, lab meeting, office hours/student meeting, phone call with colleagues about high school CS curriculum, faculty development meeting on Team-Based Learning, graded research

paper topic proposals, picked up contacts refill, prepared for meeting tomorrow, revised midterm draft and sent to TAs to test solve, set up "grading party" with TAs for next week, "cleaned for cleaner."

- Thursday: curriculum meeting, two student meetings, meeting on redesigning CS ethics class, phone call to defense investigator about former student's clearance, class, sat in on a class a PhD student of mine is teaching this semester to see how things are going, drove daughter around, went to community symposium at the library.
- Friday: stayed off campus! Updated proposal for CS teacher certification program and sent emails to set up meetings, produced draft of final report for NSF project that ended, made doctor's appointment for daughter, prepared materials on Senior Lecturer criteria for committee discussion, started putting together materials for guest lecture I'm giving in a few weeks, end-of-week email catchup, to-do list for weekend.