

The reason my supervisor chose the current post doc was because he wanted me to work closely with him. I wasn't too happy about that because I thought that the supervisors role was to guide me and teach me techniques and that the post had his own project and would 'occasionally' help me - unfortunately the post doc and I fell out in a big way due to racial issues and I find it very hard to approach him for help.

My supervisor wanted to have weekly meetings with the post doc and I - similar to a mini seminar I didn't enjoy the meetings because my presentations was ripped by both of them, I understand constructive criticism is part of the preparation for the wide world of academia, but I felt their comments were very personal bordering on sexism and I used to absolutely dread going to the seminars I was humiliated, because I have a problem with maths - I felt there was an old boys network going on.

I feel I wasted my first year of my PhD because my supervisor didn't quite know how to do certain lab techniques, he told me he went to Cambridge (his old laboratory) to work along people working in the field, but had to cut short the trip because of work commitments at the University. I see my fellow PhD colleagues with their supervisor who literally stands with the student and goes through the techniques with them. I am really jealous, because I keep hearing from my supervisor that he must get back into the lab MORE, but he seems to be bogged down with administrative work, I feel he is relying on the post doc take over my training, but the atmosphere with post doc isn't that great.

I am very scared that I will not complete this PhD in 8 months (my funding runs out in November 2007) and I so badly want to finish before it is too late. My supervisor is currently suffering from clinical depression which was finally diagnosed two months ago. I personally knew something wasn't going right with him, because he would go around the Uni building looking sullen, he would sit in the dark in his office, he would snap at me for no apparent reason and then apologize for being grumpy- so after two and half years I had to put up with his personal depression and tread lightly with him.

Last week was the worse week of my life everything went wrong for me personally and I stayed at home, because I couldn't cope with a car crash I had,

Jan

Q1 Discuss the issues that have arisen so far

Q2 List the main points you would make in your reply to Jan

Episode 3

August 2007

Hello Dr Wakeford

Sorry I have not contacted you sooner, but I am piled up with work at the moment.

Here is the situation so far. My supervision meeting with my supervisor went well and I set myself a deadline of September to complete all the experimental work, but the reality is that I won't make the deadline.

I've put plan B into place as I feel I will need another 6 months to a year to complete the project including the write up. My project has dramatically changed from a Molecular biology degree to a Chemistry/ Biochemistry PhD. I have absolute no background in Chemistry, so my supervisor is trying to get me up to scratch and I'm finding it a struggle to understand Chemistry. My supervisor gets a little impatient with me, for instance he tells me to work out a chemistry problem and I don't know to start - he assumes the concepts are easy. I've tried to help myself by reading as many Chemistry books as possible, but what I would like him to do is work through a chemistry problem from start to finish because the way I learn is for somebody to show me just once how to work through a problem or question and I can pick up the concept very quickly, but I feel as if I've been thrown into the deep end.

My PhD studentship finishes in November 2007, so my back up plan is work part



John's response to Jan (August 2007)

Dear Jan,

Very many thanks for bringing me up to date. I am glad to hear that you are making progress.

I can quite see that there is still much to do and understand that you would like to have another year to complete the thesis. However, from discussing this with other PhD candidates, I get the clear impression that having such a distant deadline combined with the need to spend much of that in full-time, tiring work, makes the completion of the doctorate increasingly difficult particularly as it competes with domestic, family and other obligations. So I would like to put another scenario to you, where you will work like a journalist with a firm deadline, who has to tailor what research is done to meeting it:

1. Clarify in your own mind the number of weeks you can have to devote yourself full-time to the doctorate. E.g. 30th November.. 14 weeks.
2. This is the deadline by which time you will have submitted the final draft of the thesis to your supervisor. It will probably be incomplete in many respects, but all practical work will have been done and where there are gaps you will put in the text 'reference to be followed up', etc
3. Communicate this plan to your supervisor/s, asking them to agree to work with this plan and set aside appropriate times for reading chapters etc, and giving feedback, although minor revisions so6 (f) 60 15c 45 01eti fer Chavsber3. ak tfiet tat sonst

Epilogue

I plan to write up as quickly as possible and re-register as a part time PhD student at Uni working with another Microbiology research group. The academic lecturer willing

Completing the MPhil, making any corrections, then pursuing a new doctorate part-time is an extensive investment in time and resources. We are probably talking about 8 years, and possibly longer, before you have the qualifications to apply for a post-doc which itself is a temporary appointment. During that time supervisors may move, your circumstances change etc. The national figure is that only 30% of those studying for a PhD part-time have that PhD 7 years later.... All I am thinking is that this is a monumental commitment with an uncertain outcome. So be sure that this is how you want to spend your time.

Best
John

Jan's response:

Thank you. I needed to hear this. I'm just disappointed that my supervisor did not give me a chance to fulfill my dream of getting a PhD in an area that I enjoy.

Yes academia is full of politics and I feel at this point I will have to walk away from further study.

I just want say thank you so much for your support and advice

Jan

Team task 3

**On the acetate provided list the main lessons for
research students
supervisors, and
departments
from your discussion of this and similar cases.**
