An unexpected career resource

A few years ago, my graduate student association ran into some trouble. We knew that our classmates wanted our career development seminar series to cover opportunities in biotechnology, yet we were struggling to identify speakers. As president of the association, it was my responsibility to tell faculty members and program administrators that we might need to shorten the seminar series. Their response was unexpected—and ended up transforming how our organization works with faculty for the better.

The executive ended up giving a wonderful presentation, and the experience paved the way for a fruitful relationship with our faculty. Since then, we have solicited faculty input on events about careers in regulatory affairs and as a medical science liaison, and on finding postdoc positions in industry. We also began a long-term collaboration with our graduate studies office to create a list of program alumni to invite to speak at future events.

Students appreciate the diversity of speakers that faculty members have helped us bring in, and many professors who had shown no interest in career development training commended our efforts after seeing their peers take a more active role (although several still say that they can’t help us because they don’t have connections working outside academia). Indeed, it seemed that as a few professors began contributing to our initiatives, the mindsets of others, including both junior and senior faculty members, started to shift.

The experience has helped me appreciate the networks that many academics maintain with their former colleagues and trainees in and out of academia. And I have been proud to advance the conversation about the importance of career development training in my school and watch the next student government boards achieve similar successes through collaborations with faculty. Ultimately, I’ve learned that trainees and faculty members can work together toward a common goal: preparing graduate students to be successful STEM professionals, no matter the position.

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