

# Catalyzing Career Exploration by Biomedical PhD Students

Deepti Ramadoss, PhD and John P. Horn, PhD



University of  
Pittsburgh®

Graduate Studies  
School of Medicine

## Introduction

- Challenge: Inadequate institutionalized training to prepare biomedical PhD students for the wide range of available careers.
- Response: we created the “Career Club”, a 1-year cohort-model pilot project.

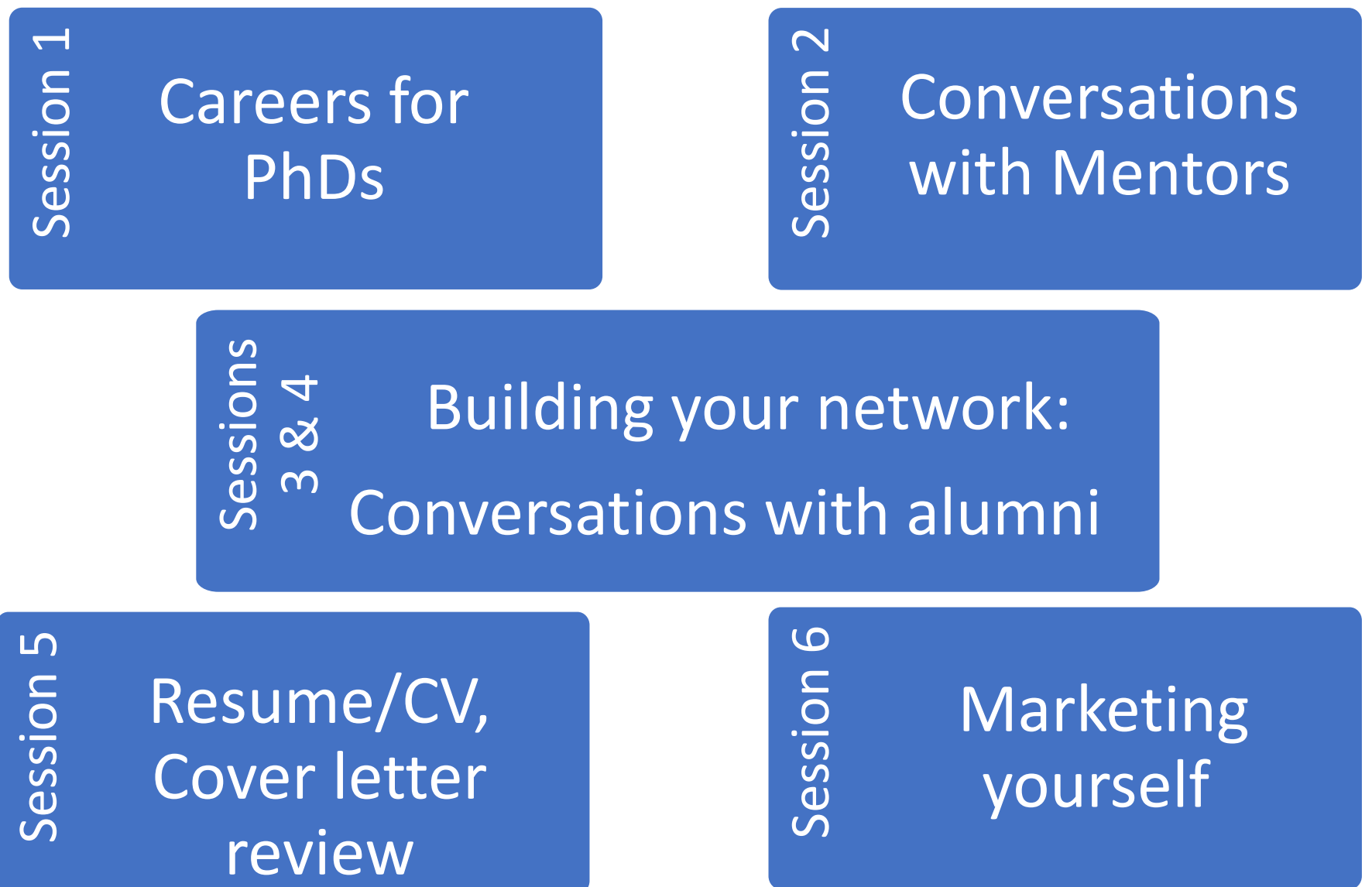
**Goal:** To lower barriers to career exploration and thereby catalyze the professional development of our students.

## Barriers hypothesized:

- **Student perception:** difficulties of making plans while conducting dissertation research
- **Faculty perception:**
  - career planning guidance lies outside expertise
  - student time-away-from-the-bench is counterproductive
- **Implementation costs** can be high

**Pilot Career Club:** Supported by a Burroughs Wellcome Fund Grant

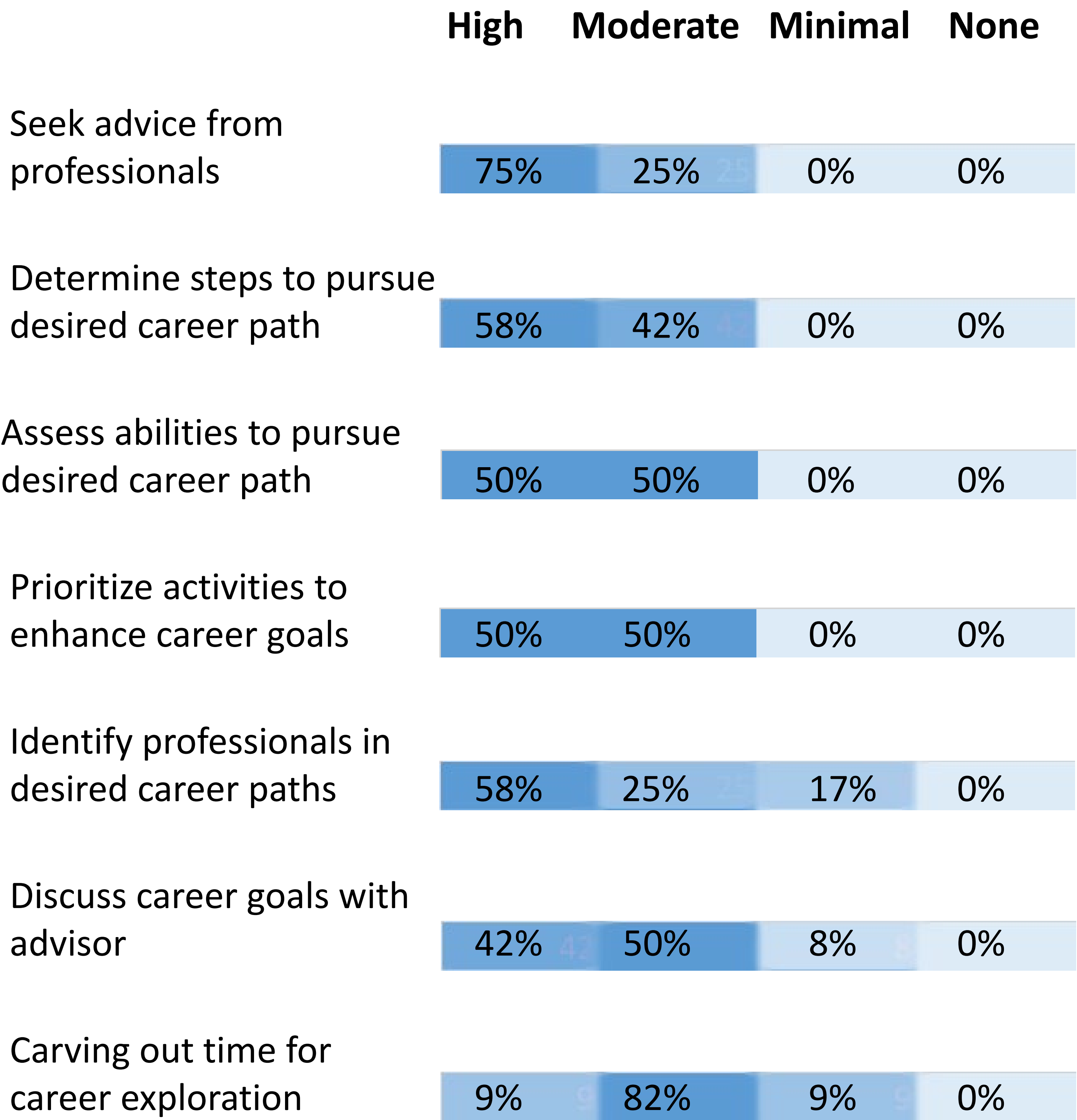
6 sequential workshops targeted to address these barriers



## Club results or products:

- **Communication skills with**
  - Faculty mentors
  - Alumni
- **Self-directed career exploration:**
  - Informational interviews
  - Soliciting and participating in internships and externships
- **Career development material:**
  - Resumes/CVs
  - Professional headshots
  - LinkedIn profiles
  - Introductory emails to professionals
  - Elevator pitches

## Resulting Student Confidence in Career Exploration Tasks:



## Direct Outcomes:

Overall increased engagement, confidence, and interest

- **Improved student and faculty perceptions** on career exploration
- **Increased self-reported confidence** regarding
  - competencies needed to pursue their desired career paths
  - self-assessments of abilities and priorities.
- **Sustained career-related communication with mentors**
- **Positive feedback from faculty mentors**, recommendations to
  - **expand** communication skills workshops
  - **create programming** for students earlier in graduate training
- **Increased interest beyond club participants:** 77% of students surveyed are interested in future instantiations of the Career Club

## Secondary Outcomes:

New support, partnerships, and efforts

- **New institutional support** for career development of PhD students
- **Strong partnerships**

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graph TD; GO[Graduate Office] --- SG[Student Groups]; GO --- SL[School Leadership]; GO --- OUI[Other University Offices]; GO --- EM[External members of the graduate career development community];
```
- **Sustainable expansion** of efforts: Club programming replicated as individual workshops open to all students.

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graph TD; A[Introductory session on institution resources for career development]; B[Alumni Networking panels]; C[Resume/CV workshops: How to find your next job]; D[Marketing yourself: professional headshots];
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- **Internship opportunities** born out of institutionally-supported partnerships
  - with alumni
  - across campus

## Expanding the Career Club program:

- **Second cohort 2023 – informed by feedback:**
  - Format (online vs. in-person) for specific sessions
  - Added individual-support
  - Informational interview/career fair
- **Stand-alone workshops:**
  - woven into the timeline of the club, to encourage further skill-development
- **New professional development sessions** not focused on late-stage graduate students

For more information on our program, resources, and tools: visit:  
<https://somgrad.pitt.edu/career-club>



Career Guidance for Trainees  
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