

Worried your Ph.D. adviser won't support career development activities? Show them this

- 15 JUL 2021
- BY [KATIE LANGIN](#)



ROBERT NEUBECKER

Nancy Saana Banono waited months to tell her Ph.D. adviser about her potential industry internship. "I wasn't entirely sure she would be happy with the internship timing, which would mean taking a break from my Ph.D. during my final year," [Banono wrote in a Working Life essay about the experience](#). When she finally mustered the courage to broach the conversation, she was relieved her adviser was supportive—but many Ph.D. students aren't so fortunate.

As career development programs and opportunities for Ph.D. students have expanded in recent years, some faculty members have expressed concerns about how much time their students may have to spend away from the lab. It's a "major barrier" to the development of these programs, according to an [article published in eLife in 2017](#).

But data published today should help alleviate those concerns. Ph.D. students who participate in career development activities—including workshops, job site visits, and internships—do not publish fewer manuscripts or graduate later than peers who do not participate in such activities, according to an analysis of more than 1700 life sciences students at 10 U.S.

universities that participated in the National Institutes of Health's Broadening Experiences in Scientific Training program. That was true even when students took part in activities that took them away from their Ph.D. research for months at a time. "Our findings suggest that doctoral students should be encouraged to participate in career and professional development opportunities to ensure their preparedness for a variety of diverse and important careers in the workforce," the authors of the study argue in the [paper, published in *PLOS Biology*](#).

Science Careers has been touting these opportunities for years. [Internships in particular are a great way to explore a promising career direction](#)—and a [similar 2018 study found internships can help students avoid "default postdocs" without extending their time in grad school](#). [Virtual options may have expanded the possibilities, though they come with their own challenges](#). For a less intensive time commitment, [online job simulations can offer glimpses of a variety of careers](#). [Given the uncertainty the pandemic has created, career development is all the more important](#).

As [Tess Torregrosa wrote in a *Working Life* essay about her experience with an industry internship](#), "I'd spent years dreaming up potential jobs based on my interests, but I didn't have any experience to know whether I'd like any of them." Now, she writes, "I understand that you never know whether you'll like something until you try it out."

doi: 10.1126/science.caredit.abl4731

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



[Katie Langin](#)

Author: Katie Langin is the associate editor for *Science Careers*.