Dear networking students everywhere,

Welcome to the first edition of a new quarterly column aimed at mentoring students in the ACM SIGCOMM community. I’m honored to be the inaugural editor. The primary objective of this column is to offer students advice on general issues pertaining to networking research, teaching, and careers. Most students have excellent advisors, but my hope is that this column will nevertheless help, e.g., by: (a) augmenting advice students get from their advisors, and (b) aiding graduate/undergraduate students who are exploring moving into networking or to a new sub-topic therein.

Here are some examples of questions this column is suitable for. This is not an exhaustive list; there are many other relevant issues that are not listed here.

• Research methods: “Is there an optimal way to approach networked systems research? What are some things to keep in mind when embarking on active measurement projects?”
• Tools, testbeds, datasets: “Where can I do experiments to test my new cool idea for data center networking”? “Are there datasets that will aid me in my research on topic X?”
• Time management ahead of conference deadlines: “How do I balance writing vs. hacking/experiments?”
• Career advice: “With so much exciting work happening in the industry, is there much point in seeking an academic job? Is a PhD in networking worth it?”
• Course choice: “Are there courses I should take to prepare myself for research in topic X? Are there online materials I can use for this?”
• Teaching networking: “I’m going to teach my first networking course in the near future. How do I prepare myself? Are there online resources I could use?”
• Getting involved: “How do I become a more integral part of the SIGCOMM community?”

I will likely not address each individual query; rather my goal is to collate (a subset of) the questions I get, group them into meaningful topics, and offer advice as best as I can. Of course, I am not an expert on many of these topics. Thus, I may seek the opinion of relevant people in the community in responding to specific queries. This column is likely to be just 1-2 pages long. As such, some answers may be brief; e.g., I may simply point folks to online resources that already offer the relevant advice.

Note that this is not an advice column of the sort you may find in magazines and Sunday newspapers. I will not address topics that are personal in nature; e.g., if you’re having an issue with your advisor I’m not the one to approach for resolution!

I will also not address questions comparing venues (“Is X a better conference than Y?”) or research topics (“Is X a better topic to work on than Y?” or “Is X dead?”). And don’t send me abstracts/papers for feedback!

Interested students can send queries to guru@sigcomm.org. Names of students asking questions will not be published by default, unless students request otherwise. If you’re not a student, and you have feedback on or disagreement with a statement or comment in my column, I’d love to hear from you as well.

Looking forward to hearing from you all.

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