Imposter Syndrome

It is not uncommon for graduate students to question their competencies, abilities, and accomplishments in the areas of research and teaching. In other words, many graduate students feel like impostors in academia, especially when it comes time to present their work. The important thing to remember here is to be kind to yourself. You are worthy of your accomplishments, deserve to be here, and your contributions are meaningful!

Feelings that may arise due to Imposter Syndrome:

- Feelings of self-doubt - “I am not as smart as they think.”
- Fear of being “found out” - “It’s only a matter of time before people realize I don’t belong here.”
- Difficulty taking credit for one’s accomplishments - “I don’t deserve to win this award.”
- Frustration with inability to meet self-set standards - “I’ll never be as good as I want to be, so why bother trying?”
- Lack of confidence, fear of making mistakes - “I don’t think I have what it takes to be a scholar.”

Studies have demonstrated that taking stock of these feelings and allowing yourself to process them is the first step to overcoming imposter syndrome. There are several helpful strategies that you can use to manage these feelings.

Strategies for managing Imposter Syndrome:

- Speak out about your feelings. Knowing there is a name for these feelings and that other people experience the same thing can be very reassuring.
- Separate facts from feelings. Everyone feels doubt from time to time but you do not need to let it control how you respond in a situation.
- Recognize when it’s normal to feel fraudulent. When something is new to you, you may feel destabilized. This is a normal feeling for any new experience!
- Asking for help is a positive thing. Don’t feel like you always need to know the correct answer. Recognize that you have just as much right as the next person to make a mistake or ask for help. If you have questions or concerns leading up to the conference, we encourage you to contact Stacey Lantz, GCWS Program Manager. Contact info can be found at the end of the document.
- Visualize your success. Steer away from imagining the worst, and visualize yourself giving a great presentation that you are proud of.
- Finally, develop a new script for yourself. Instead of focusing on negative thoughts, try saying “I will do my best and my best is good enough.”
Imposter Syndrome & Presentations

Tell the moderator and other presenters that you are nervous and why you are feeling that way. They may feel the same way or have felt the same way in the past and can validate how you’re feeling.

Tell the audience that you are nervous, especially if it is your first public presentation or online presentation. This gives them permission to write encouraging messages into the chat.

Include confidence boosters ahead of time! Put post-its around your computer screen with personalized notes like “I can do this!” “Keep going!” “Breathe!”. Write similar things in colorful pen on your notes or script. While it may sound silly, visual reminders can help prevent or redirect negative thoughts.

Keep a glass of water nearby and take a sip if you lose your place and get nervous. This will look like a natural pause and will give you a couple of seconds to get back on track.

A Final Reminder:
The definition of success is SUBJECTIVE! There is no one definition for success, and success is not dictated or defined by any singular individual. It is highly subjective and depends on one’s perspective and experiences.

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Please do not hesitate to reach out!