



# Behind the Veil of Success: Learning from (Academic) Failures and Mistakes

Sharing Stories of Challenges, Failures, and Lessons Learned. Providing Individual Mentoring Opportunities.

In this workshop, organized by the Institute of Communication and Media Studies at the University of Bern, we seek to address the imbalance in the narrative of success and failure in academia by emphasizing the importance of sharing stories of failures, mistakes, and lessons-learned. We also aim to promote a more humane and balanced approach to academic life, recognizing the interplay between professional work and personal well-being. Additionally, we would like to provide networking and exchange opportunities for media and communication scholars (and related social sciences), both within and outside Switzerland, by offering individual mentoring sessions with our speakers as well as other social activities.

Spaces are limited. Priority will be given to PhDs and (early) post-docs in the field of media and communication (and related disciplines).

Date: December 8, 2023

Place: Room 216, Mittlestrasse 43, Bern

Registration deadline: Dec 5, 2023

Register via the QR code

Contact person:  
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ikmb

Institut für Kommunikations-  
und Medienwissenschaft  
der Universität Bern

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# Full Program

9:00 - Introduction and welcome

## 9:30 - Panel I

1. **Dr. Teresa Gil-López**, University Carlos III of Madrid

Learning from multiple academic cultures — a challenge turned discovery

2. **Dr. Lara Kobilke**, Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich

Failing forward: Embracing mistakes and moving on... or not, and that's okay too

3. **Prof. Dominique Wirz**, Amsterdam School of Communication Research

Perceptions of success and fails in academia

## 10:45 - Coffee Break

## 11:15 - Panel II

1. **Dr. Franziska Barbara Keller**, University of Bern

Knowing when and how to fail: Leaving a tenure-track or not?

2. **Dr. Mykola Makhortykh**, University of Bern

Double-edged sword of interdisciplinarity: How to work across disciplines and (not to) ruin your academic career

3. **Prof. Katharina Lobinger**, Università della Svizzera italiana (University of Lugano)

Different career steps - different challenges

4. **Prof. Silvia Majó-Vázquez**, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

10 lessons from 10 years in academia

## 13:00 - Lunch

14:30 – Individual mentoring sessions with the speakers (registration required in advance)

19:00 - Dinner (registration required in advance)

# Learning from multiple academic cultures — a challenge turned discovery

In this brief talk, I will take the audience through my personal academic journey since I started my PhD 8 years ago. This journey has allowed me to know three different academic cultures: the US, Germany, and Spain. Through the differences between these three academic cultures, I came to observe and understand dynamics of academia which are often taken for granted, challenges which become invisible but that we can actually learn from once we stop to question them. The purpose of this talk is to present the three main challenges that I experienced and through them expose the idiosyncrasies of US, Germany, and Spain academic cultures to explore how they can turn into opportunities for growth and discovery in our academic journeys.



**Teresa Gil-López** (PhD Communication, University of California, Davis, 2019) is a Postdoctoral researcher in Political Communication and Media Effects at the University Carlos III of Madrid. She teaches upper division courses on Social and Data Journalism. Her research involves protest media coverage and its impact on public perceptions about dissenting groups as well as on the legitimacy of protest as a political tool. I investigate the ways in which digital technologies may have altered the relationships between social movements, the media, and the citizen discourse. Previously, she has worked at the Institute for Communication Pedagogy and Media Psychology (IKM) at the University of Koblenz-Landau, in Germany.

# Perceptions of success and fails in academia

In this talk, I will share some of my learnings about what we perceive as success and what as a fail in academia. Especially during my time as a postdoc, I realised that I evaluate myself much more critical than others do. While I tend to focus on the things that did not work out, others focus on the things that I achieved. I will share some insights that have helped me to put things into perspective, that have reduced my fear of failing, and increased my job satisfaction and well-being. I hope that some of these insights will also be helpful for you.



**Dominique Wirz** is an Assistant Professor in Youth & Media Entertainment at the Amsterdam School of Communication Research (ASCoR). Previously, she worked at the University of Zurich, where she got her PhD in 2018, and at the University of Fribourg. Her research focuses on media use and media effects in the context of entertainment and political communication. She currently leads an SNF Ambizione project on infotainment and news consumption on social media, especially Instagram and TikTok. From a methodological perspective, she is particularly interested in experiments, experience sampling, tracking data, and physiological measures.

# Failing forward: Embracing mistakes and moving on... or not, and that's okay too

In this talk, I will take you on a journey through my 5-year academic career, highlighting the many mistakes and setbacks I've encountered along the way. From the loss of my dissertation data to the challenges posed by setbacks in my personal life, this presentation isn't about dwelling on the mishaps; it's about sharing the invaluable lessons learned about resilience, acceptance, and the art of bouncing back when faced with adversity. Together, we'll discover how to fail forward, embracing our mistakes as essential components of our journey towards personal and academic growth. I'll introduce you to the various strategies I've adopted to cope with difficult situations, and you can decide if some of them are worth adopting.



**Lara Kobilke** is a political communication researcher at LMU Munich, Department of Media and Communication. She earned her PhD at the University of Zurich. Her research focuses on explaining the antecedents and consequences of pro-attitudinal and contra-attitudinal opinion exchanges. Over the last few years, she has addressed questions such as (1) how often and why some people withdraw from contra-attitudinal opinion exchanges, (2) how dialogue across lines of political difference influences political behaviors, and (3) what role alternative media and psychological dispositions play in this process. Recently, she has conducted research on youth participation in social media challenges. Methodologically, her work encompasses survey, experimental, and content analytical approaches that contribute to a mix of advanced quantitative methods (fixed effect models, mixed models, and multilevel SEMs) and computational methods (SML, NA)

# Knowing when and how to fail: To leave a tenure-track or not?

Five years into a tenure-track assistant professorship at Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, I decided to return to Switzerland and accept a three-year postdoc position at the icmb. Hong Kong's harsh Covid-restrictions and the deteriorating political situation had made some of my colleagues leave before me, and others have since joined the exodus. Others have decided or felt they had no choice but to stay. I will use this case to think through what it means to leave a tenured, tenure-track or similarly promising position in such circumstances and what may be useful criteria to make the decision to leave – or the decision to accept a position at an institution likely to face such circumstances in the future.



**Franziska Barbara Keller** (PhD in Politics, New York University, 2015) is an advanced postdoc at the Institute of Communication and Media Studies at the University of Bern (icmb) specializing in Comparative Politics, Political Communication, and Social Network Analysis (SNA). Applying SNA to informal institutions in authoritarian regimes, she explains why some elites become part of the inner circle while others get purged and how leaders can rule without holding official positions. More recently, she has examined political AstroTurfing (hidden propaganda campaigns) on social media, using SNA to reveal the coordination networks underlying such operations. She received her PhD from New York University's Department of Politics in 2015, was a postdoctoral research fellow at Columbia University's Harriman Institute and a visiting scholar at UCSD's School of Global Policy & Strategy. She left a tenure-track position as Assistant Professor at Hong Kong University of Science and Technology's Division of Social Science because of the deteriorating political situation in Hong Kong at the end of 2021.

# Double-edged sword of interdisciplinarity: How to work across disciplines and (not) ruin your academic career

In my talk, I will reflect on the advantages and shortcomings of doing interdisciplinary research and the implications it had for my academic career. Starting my career in history and area studies, I had to shift academic fields after my PhD due to the inability to secure a job in the area where I originally specialized and fundamentally change my career plans to become an interdisciplinary artificial intelligence scholar. I will discuss how interdisciplinarity can be both a source of frustration and an indicator of a personal failure and an opportunity and inspiration for doing innovative research.



**Mykola Makhortykh** (PhD in Humanities, University of Amsterdam, 2017) is an Alfred Landecker lecturer at the Institute of Communication and Media Studies at the University of Bern. In his research, Mykola focuses on politics- and history-centred information behaviour in online environments and how it is affected by the information retrieval systems, such as search engines and recommender systems. To achieve this goal, he combines traditional social science methods (e.g., content analysis and focus groups) with novel computational approaches (e.g., deep learning and agent-based testing). His other research interests include trauma and memory studies, armed conflict reporting, disinformation and computational propaganda research, cybersecurity and critical security studies, and bias in information retrieval systems. Mykola has an interdisciplinary background, which combines communication science, humanities, data science, and computer science. He received BA in History and MA in Archaeology at the Kyiv Taras Shevchenko University, a joint MA degree in Euroculture at the University of Goettingen and Jagiellonian University, and BA in Computer Science at the University of the People.

# Different career steps - different challenges

In this talk, I will discuss how the challenges of 'navigating academia' transform with changing career levels. These challenges encompass not only work-life balance, struggles with precarious work situations, forced mobility, and short-term contracts but also questions that pertain to the very nature of the 'job' as a researcher. Drawing on personal experiences, my talk aims to underscore both the benefits and problematic issues of individual career steps to provide guidance and motivation—hopefully without falling into the pitfall of nostalgically idealizing past periods and challenges.



**Katharina Lobinger** is Associate Professor for online communication at the Institute of Digital Technologies for Communication (ITDxC) at Università della Svizzera italiana. Her main research interests include networked photography, online communication, digital (visual) culture, ethics for the digital age, and creative and visual research methods. Katharina Lobinger is president of the Swiss Association of Communication and Media Research (SGKM). From 2013 to 2019 she was vice-chair and then chair of the visual communication division of the German Communication Association. Currently she is editorial board member of SComS - Studies in Communication Science, an international open-access journal jointly edited by the Swiss Association of Communication and Media Studies (SGKM) and the Faculty of Communication Sciences at USI. She is editor of the “Handbuch Visuelle Kommunikationsforschung” [Handbook of Visual Communication Research]. Katharina Lobinger was project leader of e.g., "Visualized relationships – functions and problems", a project funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNF) and "Governance of digital hate speech from the users' perspective", funded by the Federal Office of Communications.

# 10 lessons from 10 years in the academia

During my mentorship experience, and my own academic career, I have witnessed how intellectual panic, writer's block, imposter syndrome, isolation, or personal adversities, among many other challenges, unfold in the academia. These adversities at different intensities can affect anyone across ranks, seniority levels, age, or gender. Equally, I have also seen how mentorship, realistic goals, meaningful connections with peers and focus on self-care are essential allies for developing a truly meaningful career in the academia. There is not an individual recipe for having enjoyable (and happy) lives in the academia or anywhere else really. Yet, there are identifiable steps in this direction and this seminar in one of them. My goal during this seminar is to contribute some of the lessons learnt in the last ten years in the academia. A reflect on ways forwards for PhD students when they are in the mist of academic challenges. In my presentation, I will certainly take a personal standpoint, which will draw on my experience as a mentor of mid-career journalists, master students and post-docs and as female academic myself being very much aware of the extra challenges that women face when growing a family in the academia. My goal in this presentation is ultimately to help to pave the way for an open and safe space in which you can feel welcomed for voicing concerns and asking for advice and help.



**Sílvia Majó-Vázquez** is Assistant Professor at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. She is a Research Associate at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, University Oxford, where she worked from 2017 to 2023. She studies how digital technologies are reconfiguring the news media ecology, borrowing tools from network science, and leveraging digital trace data. Her research agenda considers how people navigate news and political information online and its effects on democracy. Central in her studies is the role of technological platforms in mediating news consumption and shaping people's attitudes towards media and politics. She holds a PhD in Knowledge and Information Society, a M.Sc. in Political Analysis (UOC, 2013) and a Post Degree in Political Communication (UAB, 2005) and completed her undergraduate studies in Journalism at UAB in 2004. She speaks fluent English, Spanish and Catalan. During her Erasmus at the Political Science Faculty of Københavns Universitet in 2003, she studied Danish too. Her other interests include gender studies and the representation of women on the media. In the past, she has collaborated in several studies on this area funded by national and international NGOs.