Professors on Publishing: Q&A with Ebony Bridwell-Mitchell

Event Summary

Event Info
Gutman Library Doctoral Tea Series
Professors on Publishing: Q&A with Ebony Bridwell-Mitchell
November 7, 2018 from 12noon-1pm
Gutman Conference Center

Event Overview
Several current PhD and Ed.L.D. students gathered for a "lunch and learn" session with Professor Ebony Bridwell-Mitchell in a conversation about her academic publishing experiences.

Discussion Overview
Dr. Bridwell-Mitchell began the session providing key highlights of her academic career, discussing issues such as:

- Restarting her tenure process when she arrived at HGSE. She had been an assistant professor at Brown University, but on arrival at HGSE made an intentional decision to restart the tenure process at HGSE to take advantage of the resources available to her at Harvard and take more time to build a high-impact foundation of research and publishing.
- Reframing her work and writing for different audiences. There can be challenges in submitting interdisciplinary manuscripts/papers to more narrowly focused disciplinary journals and in balancing interdisciplinary and epistemological approaches with different audiences.

Dr. Bridwell-Mitchell addressed the following topics based on questions from students:

- Replying to a "revise and resubmit" response from a journal
  - Impact on emotions
    - Criticism hurts - no matter the stage in your career. Understand that editorial boards and peer reviewers have their own theoretical and methodological lens that will influence their reading of your work and their response to it. Protect yourself as much as you can - if you see the subject line of an R&R - wait until you know you have time to read and process their comments.
  - Systematic response
    - Number or parse out each comment, revision suggestion, critique or question included in the response. Decide whether you want to accept each of those or if there are those you want push back against. In your response, be sure to address each specific comment - consider quoting the original comment, articulating your interpretation of that comment, and then identifying what changes you made in the work to address that comment.
    - The amount of time you put into your response can reflect the level of interest and commitment you are showing to the editors/reviewers.
- Understanding your own writing process and habits
  - A person should reflect and identify their own process - it's all dependent on your own cognitive approaches and preferred environments. Dr. Bridwell-Mitchell explained she likes to clear her calendar for several days at a time and focus all day on writing a complete draft
and revising, rather than writing and revising section-by-section. Some students shared other habits of writing a little every or for dedicated periods each day.

- **Positioning your research and writing between disciplines/fields**
  - The need to reposition and represent yourself differently with each field or discipline is a necessity - for better or worse. If you're not fully grounded in the theoretical traditions of a field, that's okay - just be sure you know enough to recognize where you may have gaps. Before submitting to a journal, be sure to research the journal's scope, lens, submission processes and editorial board members in order to have a better understanding of the implicit or explicit approaches the editors are taking on the issue/discipline.

- **What to publish and where**
  - Dr. Bridwell-Mitchell explained that everyone has their own way of making this decision. She realized that what worked for her was first to focus on writing the best paper she can and then focus on where to publish that paper.

- **Negotiating shared authorship**
  - It will differ by discipline or culture (international vs. local collaborators), but start the conversation as early as possible in the research and writing process about who will be first author, second author, etc. If possible, articulate in the work itself who the collaborators are and their contribution to the work's research, writing process. Typically, the person doing the most intellectual work on a paper will be listed as first author.

- **Participating on editorial boards/peer review process**
  - It's a way to stay current in the field, to impact the field, to build relationships with editors and expand your network.

- **Strategizing your first publication submission**
  - If you are embarking on submitting your first manuscript, consider it likely that you will get a revise and resubmit response to journals - particularly from high-tier, high-impact journals. As a result, approach it as a learning process and an opportunity to receive very high-quality, in-depth feedback from a key journal in your field. Higher quality journals should have invested editorial board members and peer reviewers who will provide in-depth responses to your work; if you get short, non-conducive responses from a journal, consider further whether it is a journal worth the effort and time to continue working with.