

Surviving in Academia in the United States

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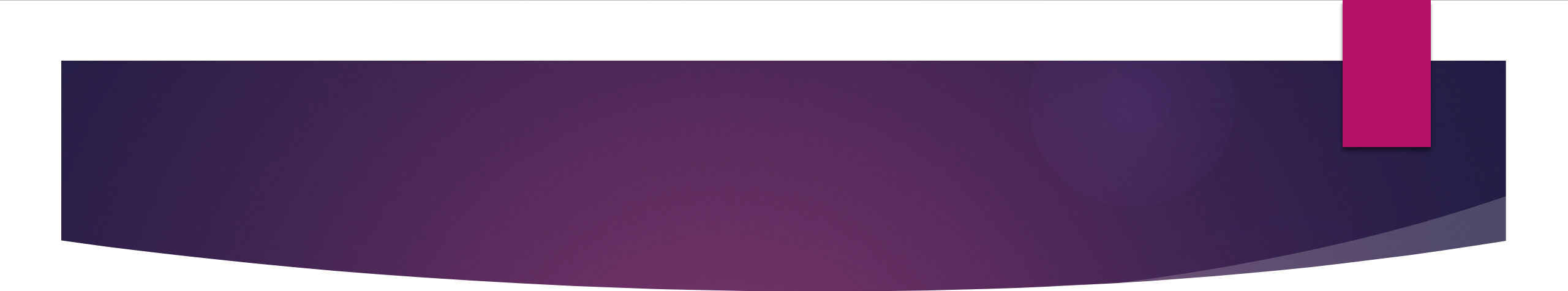
NAPA Talk Session - II
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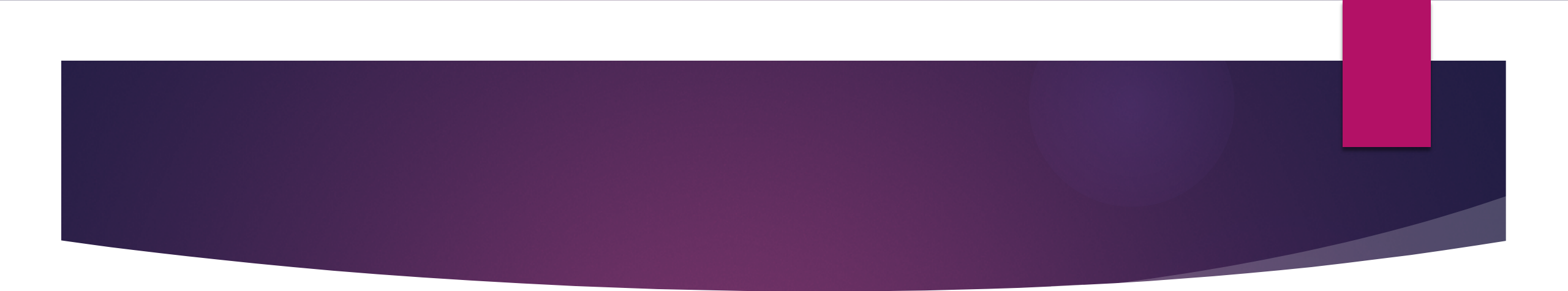
Speaking from my experience

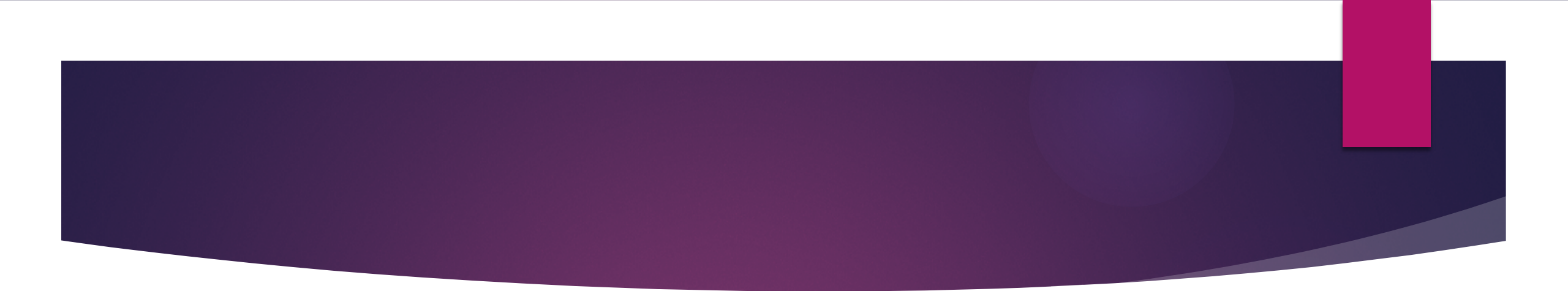
- ▶ M.S. from Auburn University and Ph.D. from the University of Georgia
- ▶ Faculty at Auburn and LSU
- ▶ Visiting faculty at GHCC/NASA and Vanderbilt University
- ▶ Journal editor of one of the major journals in agricultural economics

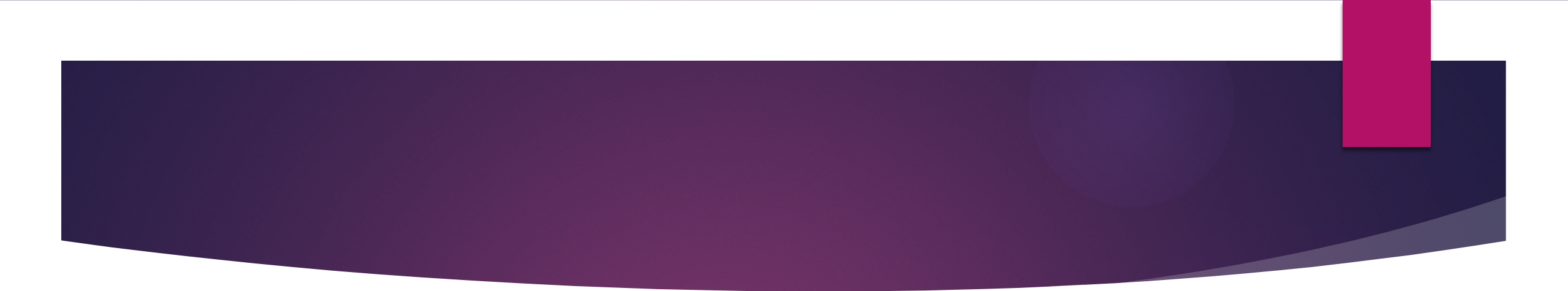
For graduate students

- ▶ Choose subject/research area in which you have most interest
- ▶ Choose a major professor who has a track record of success in publication and has name recognition in the field
- ▶ If you cannot find a professor who has the qualifications listed above, find a professor who can guide you well
- ▶ Do not work in the field/subject with limited opportunities
- ▶ Try to branch out by adding skill sets– GIS, Statistics, applied mathematics etc.

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- ▶ Do minor to complement your subject area, if possible
 - ▶ Professors evaluate you every day. Just because you published one journal article does not mean you can disappear from your office for a long time without notifying your major professor
 - ▶ Professors think you have 25 hours a day
 - ▶ Stay in communication with your major professor every day
 - ▶ Never argue or fight with your professors. You need good recommendation letters to get a job.
 - ▶ In fact, treat your major professor almost like “God”

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- ▶ Try to do well in your class but remember your major professor does not care about your grades. All s/he cares is you get at least a B grade in each class taken in your grad program
 - ▶ Take exams seriously
 - ▶ Get in your research topic from day 1

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- ▶ Identify top journal, top researchers, top issues in your research field
 - ▶ Develop the habit of reading articles from top five journals in your field on a regular basis
 - ▶ For international students, getting a TA job or having experience of teaching a lower level class is very helpful to land a tenure track job

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- ▶ Remember you have lexicographic preference: study is your top preference
 - ▶ You must meet the deadline given to you by instructors and major professor
 - ▶ Write papers, present those in conferences, network with researchers, and publish as many as you can in quality journals. Some publication is better than none but one article in a top journal may be worth 5-10 articles in second or third tier journals
 - ▶ Take professional presentations seriously. You may not know people in the audience but they are judging you. Always prepare well and do your best!

Assistant Professor and higher

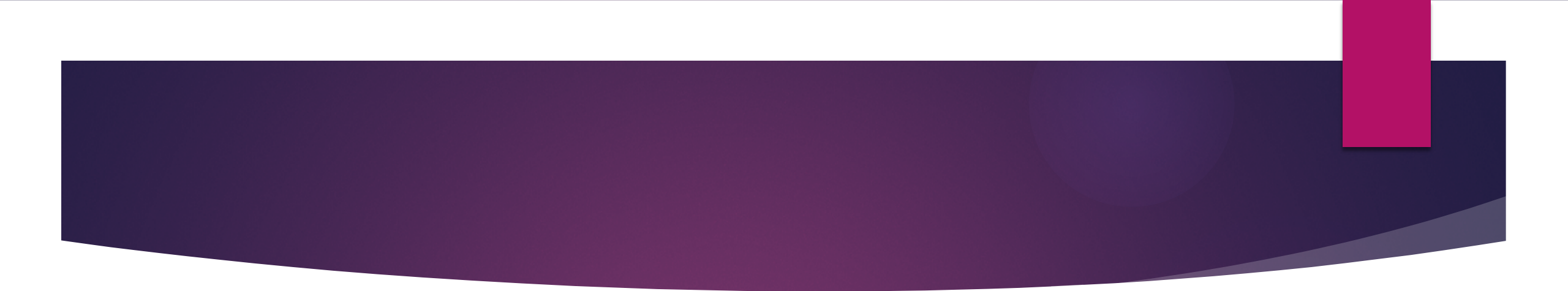
- ▶ Networking, publication/publication potential, name of your professor, and reputation of your institution (more importantly your department) help you to land an initial faculty job
- ▶ Getting a tenure in that job depends entirely on you

What are the expectations?

- ▶ Make sure you are clear on what are expected of you
 - ▶ How many journal articles, which levels (A,B,C,D)
 - ▶ How much in research grant
 - ▶ Teaching evaluation, number of courses to teach
 - ▶ Get your Hatch/multistate proposal done within three months of your job

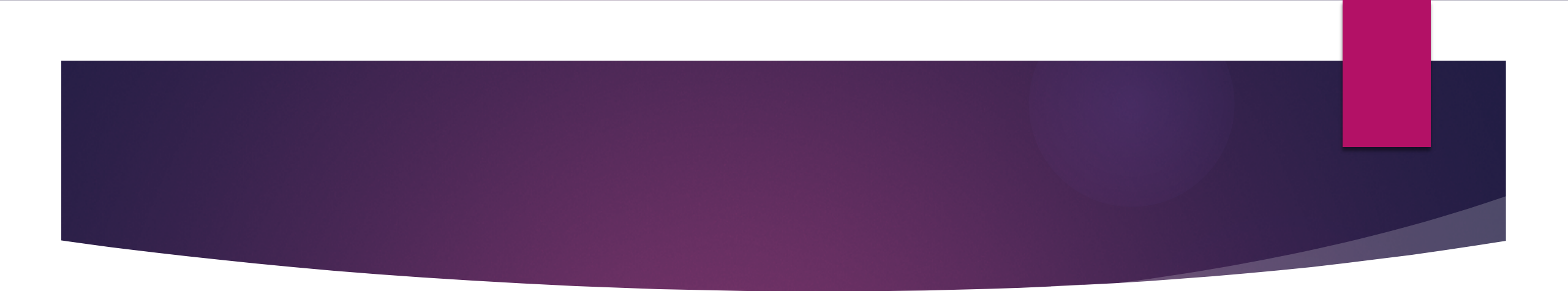
Publications

- ▶ Publish or perish
- ▶ Write, write, and write
- ▶ Only way to improve your writing skill is to write more
- ▶ Get 10 recent papers published in your subject matter in top journals and use those as guidelines on how to write better
- ▶ Once you finish a manuscript and you are happy with it, have your colleagues look at it for technical content and readability

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- ▶ At least in ag economics, a manuscript submitted to a journal has to be almost flawless. Rejection rate is very high. Papers get desk rejected too often
 - ▶ Best papers get published in top journals and a good paper will find a home somewhere

Publication strategy

- ▶ Try to write/work on paper that is on the center of discussion in your field
- ▶ Start your submission from the highest quality journal that is likely to take your paper. If gets rejected, go to a lower level journal in a pecking order
- ▶ Know who publishes on your research topic
- ▶ Show awareness of topic by citing top papers on the subject matter
- ▶ Treat reviewers like “god.” They are almost always right. Do not argue with reviewers or the editors unless they are absolutely wrong. You are not going to win

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- ▶ Network and collaborate with top people in your field, if possible
 - ▶ Although focusing on one area is great, remember you are a new assistant professor so you need to venture out beyond your comfort zone
 - ▶ Have at least six papers in a review all the time
 - ▶ Getting revise/resubmit is the best thing that can happen to you, act on immediately
 - ▶ Give credit where credit is due

Service/outreach

- ▶ Do not get involved in too many service work. Minimum is preferred
- ▶ Stay away from too many time killing responsibilities
- ▶ Do not take too many review responsibilities
- ▶ Do not reject request to review journal manuscript if you would like to publish in that particular journal

Teaching strategy

- ▶ It is best not to put too much weight on teaching if you land a job in a land grant university
- ▶ Teaching college/4-year university may have different requirements

Undergrad Teaching

- ▶ Minimize time spent on undergrad teaching
- ▶ Use TA
- ▶ Use question bank
- ▶ Minimize essay questions in the test

Graduate teaching

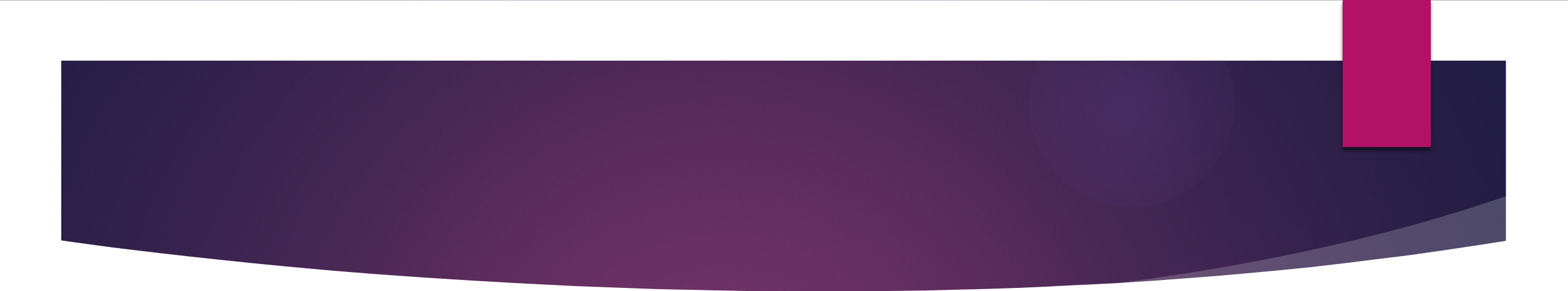
- ▶ Focus more on journal article reading
- ▶ Require students to write a term paper
- ▶ One option may be to give a topic to students and ask them to write papers on the topic
- ▶ Encourage good student papers to submit to meeting/journal
- ▶ Collaborate on the best student's paper if the student's major professor agrees. Provide clear written conditions for collaboration/co-authorship

Grad student advising

- ▶ Get the best student possible to work for you
- ▶ Tell them what your expectations and conditions are for assistantship
- ▶ Be caring but be tough
- ▶ Meet with your grad students regularly
- ▶ Be a role model mentor
- ▶ Evaluate student performance every semester

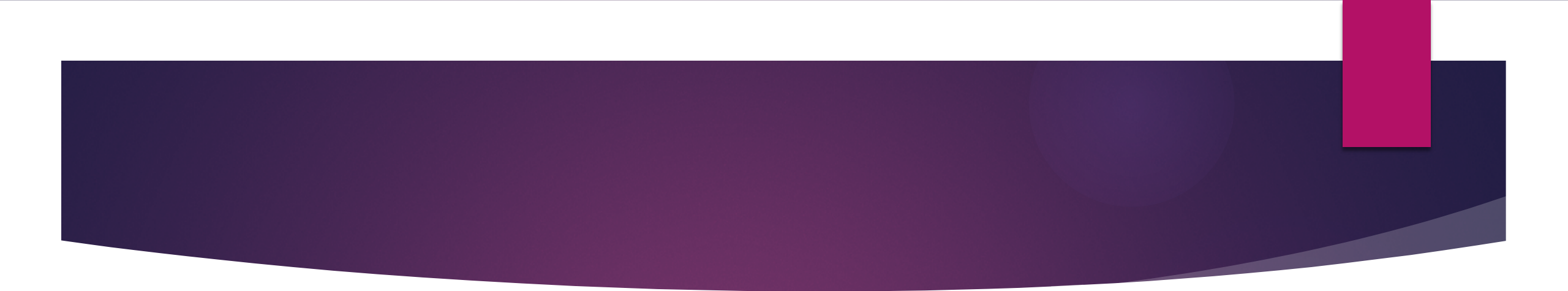
Grant writing/funding

- ▶ Grant writing is a very important part of your job in an ag college
- ▶ Often times, no grant means no grad students, research associate, no lab etc.
- ▶ It is tough to get federal grants in economics. Competition is too high
 - ▶ Play second fiddle
 - ▶ Start with local and small grant
 - ▶ Get into your state's priority areas, know your stakeholders
 - ▶ Get support from your commodity group

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- ▶ Grant proposal has to be almost flawless. Unlike journal manuscripts, grant proposal funding process is accept/reject. There is almost no chance to revise/resubmit
 - ▶ Focus on technical narrative part as that is what gets funded. Delegate responsibilities to different Co PIs/research associate. Grant writing is a very time consuming process
 - ▶ In case of rejection, continue to work on your area of specialization, revise the proposal and find other funding agencies who may support your work
 - ▶ Serve in grant evaluation panels. It helps you understand the “sausage” making process

Associate to full professor

- ▶ Tenure requires you to be good in your field. The hidden criteria is also that you better not be known as a difficult person to work with
- ▶ Once you know what works, stick with the topic/ideas
- ▶ Keep getting better
- ▶ DO NOT make enemies, especially never start conflict with full professors. You may never make it to a full professor.

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- ▶ Stay low and do the “right things”
 - ▶ Politics can be brutal. Remember politics is always local

Full professor

- ▶ You made it!
- ▶ Try to be a good mentor to young faculty and grad students
- ▶ Take leadership roles in your profession
- ▶ Get involved internationally
- ▶ If you enjoy doing research, keep on pushing the frontier
- ▶ If not, look for an administrative job

Conclusions

- ▶ Academia can be a brutal place to work in the U.S.
- ▶ Hard/smart work can make the difference
- ▶ Getting along, strong networking, and hard work can help you to flourish in your profession
- ▶ It is almost a 24/7 job until you become a full professor
- ▶ Academia is not for everyone