

Postdoc Association Notes
January 16, 2008

Attending: Rifat Hasina, Cheng Huang, Liz Jablonski, Guoqing Lin, James McCracken, Harold Olivey, Victoria Robinson, Isaac Skromne, Madina Sukhanova, Ben Wolfe, Melissa Lindberg, and Parag Shah.

Discussion:

New Member and Secretary: Liz Jablonski was introduced as a new member of the Steering Committee. She will be taking over the Secretary position. She's in her first year at U of C, working with Dorothy Sipkins, but is in the 3rd year of her postdoctoral experience: she was studying cancer at Northwestern before.

Seminar Series: The Seminar Committee is asking for new members: Isaac is leaving at the end of this year, and Ayaz is job-hunting and would like to have a new job by the end of the academic year as well. One or two new members are needed to keep the committee functional, even if one member doesn't want to contact speakers but can help out with set up and clean up for the seminars/socials. The seminar series is now scheduled for every Friday through March. The first seminar drew 25; the Monday seminar drew about 80 in attendance. Victoria will put a notice in the Weekly Bulletin re the need for new members.

Survey action points: We need to get the word out better about the PDA and the resources that are available for Postdocs. The Weekly Bulletin is not enough. The Orientation packet is a good way, as well as a brochure that can be available in departmental offices/HRs that people can pick up. Parag will have a meeting with the Executive Administrators and will talk about the PDA and the website to them so that they are aware of it.

Another concern is the lack of grant-writing resources. The PDA could work with ORS to put together a workshop for grant-writing. Even though there are seminars that periodically talk about grant-writing, there is a need for a real workshop where participants can work on a grant with feedback. Perhaps it could be run by faculty; Melissa will find out who teaches the grad student courses on grant-writing as potential contacts. There was discussion on what the workshop would look like, who would need to have input: it was suggested we compile a list of resources and move from there.

The next area of concern was the lack of yearly evaluations for postdocs: around 20% reported being evaluated. Perhaps a form could be posted on the web that postdocs could download and use as a starting point for a conversation with their mentors. This could also go in the Orientation Packet. This is an issue that could be raised with Pat Shymanski, as it should be done routinely as postdocs are re-appointed. James has a form that was developed: he will send it around for review.

Also, another idea was to work with CAPS to have a big yearly career symposium: perhaps with informative talks about alternative careers. Most postdocs want to go into academia, but there is a concern there aren't enough jobs for all those being trained. So

many will need to explore alternative career options. Even though we do that on a regular basis in the career seminar series, there is a need to do a bigger event as well. It would be nice if it could be geared toward postdocs, focused towards students/graduate students. What to do post-postdoc?

Another issue for many postdocs is the dearth of affordable childcare in Hyde Park.

Postdocs would also like more teaching opportunities. This is a structural problem, as postdocs are paid to work on the bench, not teach: their contracts are very specific. How does the funding of teaching opportunities for postdocs occur? There are courses that would probably be available to interested postdocs, but how to change the structure so that its possible?

Again, there is a need for an ombudsman for postdocs to deal with grievances.

A disturbing trend in the data from the survey was that female postdocs reported being paid less than male postdocs. It was suggested that a meeting with Pat Shymanski would be in order to go over the data with her: she should be aware of what the data shows. Other issues (like the yearly evaluations, desire for teaching opportunities, ombudsman) could also be brought up to her in that meeting. That meeting should occur before the survey data is posted on the web. Nancy should also attend the meeting.

Website/Brochure: Melissa handed out a first draft of the brochure, and asked for comments.

Benefits: GPA did not send out confirmatory emails in December; cards have been slow to arrive. Most people now have health insurance cards. Dental cards are an issue: of those on the Steering Committee eligible for dental insurance, none had yet received their cards. The transition has definitely not gone as planned, and it has caused difficulty for postdocs. Melissa will contact GPA about the schedule for cards to be mailed out, and query them on the transition period. They definitely needed more people answering the phones during the transition period, as some reported being on hold for over a half hour. Parag pointed out that collecting these stories in written form would definitely be useful when contracts are re-negotiated.

Announcements: Harold posted a new job listing on the web site. All should check it out and give feedback.