

Post Doc Association Notes
May 18, 2005

Attending: Dibyendu Bhattacharyya, Thelma Tennant, Imogen Hurley, Isaac Skromme, Andie Ward, Nancy Schwartz, Parag Shah, Melissa Lindberg Guest: Heather Sevenser
Absent: Arun Roy

Announcements: Carol Manahan, of the National Science Foundation, who did her Post Doc at Johns Hopkins, will be coming to give two talks. She was a founder of the NPA, and is an AAAS Fellow. Charlene Cho, who is a recent alumna, will serve as moderator. Originally scheduled for May 24th, it has been rescheduled for Friday, August 19th.

N. Schwartz also made an announcement about the Pew Consortium, which is hosting a workshop for new faculty June 24-26, focused on teaching. Post-Docs are welcome to attend. The Midwest Pew Consortium is comprised of approximately 13 schools, most of them small, liberal arts colleges, with the exception of the University of Chicago and Washington University, the two research institutions involved.

Discussion: Heather Sevenser from CAPS joined us for the beginning of the meeting. She has a MS in Plant Biology, and is currently the advisor for graduate students and Post Docs in Biological Sciences. She counsels on both academic and non-academic careers. She had several handouts, including a brochure for the graduate services at CAPS, a bookmark for Professors on Call – a resource where U of C alumni, professors at a range of institutions, provide information and support to graduate students (and other alumni) on the academic job market, and a bookmark for www.sciencejobs.com. She noted that she sees a large number of Biological Science Post Docs (there are currently roughly 300 Post Docs in the Biological Sciences). I. Hurley asked about links to the Post Doc website, and asked for a little blurb about CAPS to go with the link. I. Skromme noted that they'd be interested in having someone from CAPS speak as part of the Seminar Series planned for next year. H. Sevenser noted that the Alumni Network would also be a good resource for finding speakers. She spoke also about workshops CAPS gives on the mechanics of finding a job; N. Schwartz asked about a utility that CAPS had had called "Toolbox" on how to do a job search – H. Sevenser stated that it was being redesigned. It was agreed that H. Sevenser would be put on the listserv.

The next topic was an update on the web site: P. Shah noted that the BSD IT were not developing new web sites for a few months. BSD web sites are frames-based at the moment. NSIT will develop in, for a charge. A meeting has been set up with the developer. He noted that if the PDA does the maintenance the charge will be cheaper.

I. Hurley spoke about the NPA meeting, which she found really useful. She said it was notable how good it is here at the University of Chicago compared to many other institutions. There were a mixture of seminars, and she gleaned some ideas on how to improve the PDA. She noted there were some good posters, and some good talk ideas.

Post Docs are not employees, and benefits are taken out post taxation. There was a cost of living increase with an extra supplement specifically to cover the taxes on benefits.

FICA payments would double under some interpretations of new NIH rules, but University lawyers have decided that the rule does not apply to the University.

A Sigma Xi post doc survey found that the majority of post docs in the US are not citizens. The study is called "Doctors without Orders."

The post doc system needs a shock. The first generation of those who were active in founding the NPA focused on getting nationwide representation for post docs; the second generation is trying to implement change. The next NPA meeting will be in Washington, DC in April, 2006.

It was also noted that the NPA has a series of survival guides, including one for international students.

I. Skromme discussed plans for the Seminar Series. He stated it should start in the fall, and take a break during the summer months. He's developing a list of topics and ideas, and plans to tap on professors, Alumni, CAPS, Human Resources during the enrollment period, the patents office, etc. There will be sessions with Post Docs invited to speak – 2 per session, with 20 minute talks each. Outside speakers will have 30 minutes to speak, plus question-and-answer afterwards. There will be one per week, on Fridays at 4 pm. When no speakers are available, it will be a social event.

It was suggested that perhaps there could be a social event at the end of summer? A kick-off for the series, the web site, and the PDA? D. Bhattacharyya offered to help plan the series with I. Skromme and I. Hurley. They will meet within the month to discuss what needs to be done.

T. Tennant discussed the Orientation Packet, handing out the first draft of the packet. This will be an ongoing resource for Post Docs. It will be updated yearly, with a note that the web site is the place to go for the most current information. She sees it as living in a binder, with a detailed index, and headings/tabs for topic areas. Departments will give it out to new and current post docs. She thinks that when put together and complete it will be close to 100 pages. She envisions it as a summer project, to be done by the fall. Also discussed was the concept of having one or two current post docs be available for new post docs to contact via e-mail to answer questions, or perhaps have a buddy system for new post docs to get them oriented to University of Chicago.

The question of meeting was then discussed, and it was decided that the post docs could meet in small groups to get planning work done, while the whole group, including the Office of Graduate Affairs, would try to meet once a quarter. The next meeting should be planned for mid-July. D. Bhattacharyya noted that he would be away July 10-15th.