

Postdoc Association Notes
November 15, 2007

Attending: Judy Cannon, Rifat Hasina, Cheng Huang, Kolla Krisjansdottir, James McCracken, Harold Olivey, Victoria Robinson, Ayaz Sayeed, Isaac Skromne, Madina Sukhanova, Ben Wolfe, Melissa Lindberg, Parag Shah, and Nancy Schwartz.

Discussion:

Survey data: Ben and Rifat solicited comments about the survey data, as they will then put the data in its final form. They noted interesting comparisons between non-US and US citizens, and pointed to the breakdown of the country of citizenship. The answers to the questions on whether there is interest in a course on lab management, and whether there is interest in allowing postdocs to teach while they are here indicated interest in both. In compensation, it seems that women postdocs are not paid as much as their male counterparts across the board. Postdocs who have been here more than five years are less likely to receive NIH standard pay scale: Nancy pointed out that lab funding often doesn't cover the increase in postdoc salaries, and that PI's who pay below scale have to give good reasons for it. Also, the scale for Postdocs for 5, 6, 7 years out was calibrated toward MD/PhDs, as their residency and fellowship training is counted in the "postdoctoral" phase of their careers. Its relatively recent that Nancy and Academic Affairs began reviewing postdoc salaries, and asking for justification for below-scale pay. Approximately 65% of postdocs have attended PDA seminars at least once; however, no one could find the mentoring plan on the PDA website. In reading the comments, its clear that childcare remains a real issue for postdocs. The University's Office of Graduate Affairs has put together a list of childcare options in Hyde Park.

Website/Brochure: Melissa asked for pictures for a PDA brochure; Harold echoed that request for the website. Parag noted that OGPA has a digital camera which can be used for pictures. Melissa also asked members to think about what text they wanted to include in the brochure. She has begun to work on the brochure. Harold has put a link to the PDR Policy Manual that was sent out on the web site.

Seminar Series: Kolla and the Seminar Committee have gotten much of the winter lined up, but continue to look for ideas for seminars. James suggested a seminar on financial planning for postdocs (he has a contact).

Postdoctoral Researcher Policy Manual: Some people received the new policy manual from their administrators. Copies were made available at the meeting. Some questions were raised: what is a "Postdoctoral Fellow – paid direct" – it is a postdoctoral fellow whose funding is not funneled through the University but is paid directly by the funding agency to the fellow. If the wording of the "fellowship" says that the postdoc is paid a salary, that makes them a scholar even if the funding comes from outside the university. There is now language in the policy manual to ensure that a PDR cannot be let go without due process: this is a change. In the case of funding loss, the PDR should have a month's notice, and the PI must prove a lack of funds. The University does not take ownership of PDRs as it does for graduate students (i.e., for a graduate student whose PI's lab closes, the Division will find another lab for the graduate student and continue the student's

funding). Conflict resolution was not addressed in the manual. The number of years a postdoc may remain a PDR is fixed by the University, although some divisions (like the BSD) may have stricter guidelines. PDRs may be promoted to Research Associate or Research Professional after their postdoctoral training is completed. Neither title may be used as a “postdoctoral” category. That is now University-wide as well.

Benefits: Most of the confusion regarding Garnett-Powers and the changes in benefits seem to have been cleared up. Garnett-Powers seems to have enough flexibility in their approach to dealing with postdocs, which allays some fears. The mailing HR did for the benefits was well done, and included a letter telling the postdoctoral scholars what benefits they needed to be concerned about. The only concern was if PDS did not open their envelopes: should an email go out telling them to open their packets? There was also a discussion of supplementals: these are included in their stipend checks, and are taxable. There are two levels, depending on the type of fellowship funding and what it includes.

Announcements:

Nancy announced that NPA would like to give a talk here. Alison Reed would like to come to Chicago to raise the visibility of NPA in the Midwest. Nancy will talk to Phil Clifford to be sure that whatever event NPA does will not conflict with his “Putting Your PhD To Work” workshop. There was discussion about working with Northwestern and UIC to do an event that would be available to postdocs from all three campuses.

Nancy also noted that there is now a “Postdoctoral Leaders” group through AAMC – which will now be an official section (AAMC is the American Association of Medical Colleges, which has 122 US members). This will be an organization of deans and directors. She’s also giving a workshop on postdoctoral issues at the Council of Graduate Students in December. Rifat asked if they (Rifat and Ben) should do a presentation at NPA on the survey results, and Nancy thought it was a good idea.