

Minutes from PDA Steering committee meeting 11-25-08

Action points

Present: James McCracken, Judy Cannon, Mike Seiler, Victoria Robinson, Cheng Huang, Melissa Lindberg, Nancy Schwartz, Parag Shah, Rifat Hasina, Harold Olivey, Natacha Bodenhausen, Kolbrun (Kolla) Kristjansdottir, Cristos ?

I. Mike Seiler and the Biotechnology Association

Mike is a postdoc from Albert Bendelac's lab and is interested in Biotechnology Association. The main goals are to develop the business and management side of postdoctoral career opportunities by building bridges to the biotechnology sector. The biotechnology association has the following major goals:

1. Increase the transparency and information about the biotechnology field as an alternative career path for postdocs in the BSD. A major initiative is to increase contacts with both companies and the Graduate School of Business (GSB) at the U of C.
2. Increase working relationships with biotechnology companies in the Midwest. Increase networking opportunities and let postdocs know what jobs are available.

Mike is in the beginning stages and would like to recruit members. All agreed that the best method would be for Mike to draft a statement to be put out in the weekly bulletin.

Mike has spoken with several postdocs, faculty members, and Dean Schwartz. All have been enthusiastic. Surprisingly, he has received a lot of faculty support. Institutional support also depends on the need to demonstrate interest by the postdoc community.

Several instruments on campus are already available for Mike to tap into, both courses and contacts.

Question was raised whether this would fall under the auspices of the PDA. Mike and Nancy felt that most likely this Biotechnology Association would fall under the PDA as a subgroup. This would eliminate overlapping effort by the PDA and Mike and his committee.

Nancy mentioned the existence of several resources. There is a "Business Lab" which is run by Bob Rosenberg who recruits companies to run a class through the GSB consisting of GSB students and BSD graduate students. For one quarter, these students meet with the company. This gives BSD graduate students hands on experience and networking opportunities. Predoctoral students also have an official combined degree option for MBA and Ph.D. It would be difficult to envision such an arrangement for postdocs as postdocs do not pay any tuition.

Nancy also discussed the development of specific program tracks for postdocs at University of Pennsylvania. Penn has ~1500 postdocs, so much larger institution than we are. Penn has instituted a teaching track. This includes a course taught by the Education department (we don't have one) as well as arranging for teaching opportunities with smaller universities in the Philadelphia area.

Penn is now starting a biotechnology track. It will consist of a collaboration with the Wharton school. They will set up internships for postdocs with biotech companies.

Another issue to keep in mind with these tracks is that they only accommodate a small # of postdocs, about 15 in each track. The key is to obtain strong commitments from postdocs, this is not something they can say they want but not really participate in.

Mike talked to his advisor who asked whether the BSD might be interested in also giving GSB students a chance to take courses in by BSD faculty, or to learn about science.

Ideas for collaboration with the GSB included a workshop for postdocs given by GSB faculty, one course that compresses management and business skills and ideas. One hurdle might come from PIs who may not want their postdocs to take time away from the lab. Kolla suggested a signed release by the PI that formalizes their agreement with the postdoc taking time to pursue biotechnology tracks.

II. Website: Harold

We should have a quote from NSIT soon for redesign cost. Harold showed a “wireframe” of the new website design with a demo on his computer. Generally, most of the same information has been kept, but the design is simpler with a few information boxes and not as much text.

New features:

Link back to homepage

Links not clear on old homepage. The new page will draw more attention to them.

Design will be more similar to the University of Chicago homepage

Less words, more visual impact.

Bulletin will have its own box.

Search engine capability on new homepage

Seminar information will be short, cut out needless information

Smaller picture on homepage

Postdoc info session will have own box

There will be a “Special announcement” box that can appear transiently. When there is a special announcement, e.g. Abbott session, it appears, but when there is not, it will disappear.

Links will have drop down menus

Funding gets its own link

Suggestions by PDA committee:

Add a contact us link

Split postdoc life and work issues

Harold also said there is too much duplication of information on the current website. **If committee members can assist with figuring out where the duplication is and to let him know to get rid of it. Also look for broken links and let Harold know.**

Harold, James, and Melissa will meet next week with NSIT to go forward. **If there are other suggestions, email Harold.**

The question came up of whether the steering committee might also change content on the postdoc page. The U of C does not support a content management system such as plone that Natasha had discussed. Instead, they use a web-based program to change website. Specific pages can be changed by authorized members. The changes are all done by web. Mostly, only the text can be changed. The system is simple, less work for Harold. James suggested each person authorized try to make changes to make sure the access works.

III. Biocareer Center:

Nick Folger from Biocareercenter.com spoke to Nancy about selling the service to BSD postdocs. James, Harold, and Judy got an online tour. All were happy with what they saw. It is similar to science careers with articles and resources for career development. Special features were reviews of books on career development and ratings for these books. Also, there are site specific job listings and these jobs are targeted for post Ph.D. graduates. The site is built like monster.com but targeted only for biological scientists with Ph.D.s.

Cost is a factor. CAPS is not interested in paying for service. Suggestions: Invite CAPS director and Heather Sevener to come and talk to them about the advantages of this. Also, discuss issue with Heather first to get her on board.

CAPS director and Heather will be invited to a future PDA meeting. Also, James will do a demo of the site for the whole committee at the next meeting.

IV. Nancy Schwartz had a few issues she wanted to address:

- 1- 4 year term. It's clearly stated in the new handbook. The University instituted a 4 year rule for postdocs, with a 5th year option for BSD postdocs. This 5th year extension is dependent only on Nancy's approval. PIs need to request the 5th year. Nancy is regularly approving the 5th year. If the PI does not request the 5th year, there is nothing we can do.
- 2- Garnett-Powers comments. The request for comments on Garnett Powers is being sent to the next level within the U of C. Nancy will make sure it gets back to G-P. They seem like they will be receptive to keeping a good relationship with the U of C. There were quite a few comments and **Melissa has compiled a summary of these comments. She will send out the compilation to the committee.**
- 3- Training related expenses on fellowships: Some fellowships come with extra monies. Some postdocs have complained that the PIs use this money for lab expenses rather than allow the postdocs to use it for personal use such as insurance costs. There is no BSD policy on the use of these monies and it is up to the PI and postdoc to work it out.
- 4- Postdoc info sessions attendance appears to be constant, will 6-8 attendees each session. Most committee members felt that the sessions are useful and should continue monthly.

5- Economic situation is hitting the BSD as well. Cost-cutting measures are being instituted throughout the BSD. The big cost for the PDA is food. The committee agreed to cut one social for next year, have snacks rather than food at socials. Kolla will work on asking companies that come to contribute to food expenses. There was discussion of cutting back on alcohol, pizza, etc. We will wait to see how the current cost cutting measures go.

We agreed there needed to be a December meeting which will be scheduled.

Submitted by JLC