

BSD PDA Survey 2006 Report

Biological Sciences Division Postdoctoral Association

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Website: <http://www.uchicago.edu/bsdpostdoc/>

August 3, 2006

Disclaimer

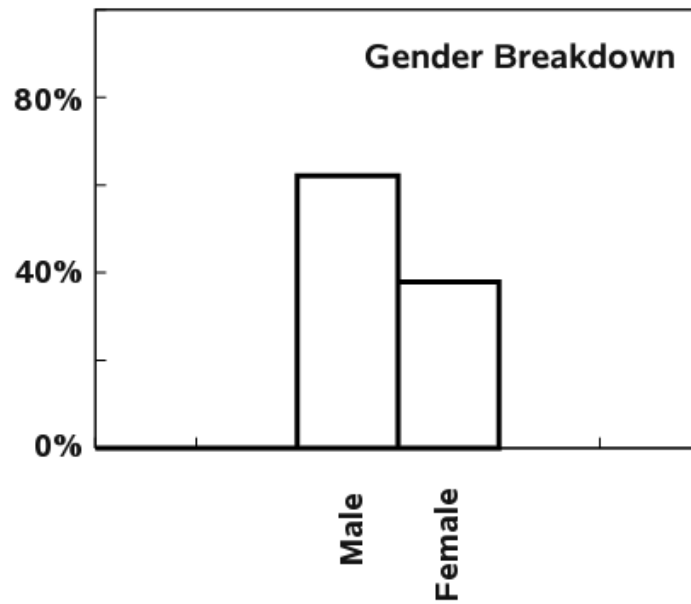
The number of survey responses (140) represents close to 50 % of the total number of postdocs in the Biological Sciences Division. The accuracy of the observations here therefore depend on the assumption that the statistics displayed by the part of the population that responded are roughly the same as the entire postdoc population.

Method

The survey was principally designed to be a recurring annual tool to get relevant information about the BSD postdoc community, and was much shorter than the initial 2001 BSD postdoc survey. Survey participants were recruited by email and through the BSD Postdoctoral Association website homepage. Emails advertising the survey were sent to the BSD Postdoctoral Association email listserv which includes a list of BSD postdocs provided by the BSD Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Affairs and any other University of Chicago postdocs who have expressed an interest in the association. Survey entries were collected over a period of two weeks (June 19 - July 3, 2006). Periodic reminders were sent during this time and raffle prizes of an iPod nano, and \$ 60 and \$ 30 restaurant gift certificates were offered as an incentive to participate. All responses were collected via a SurveyMonkey.com online survey. A total of 150 responses were collected but manual examination showed some repeated or blank entries. Removal of these led to a total of 140 responses, which were then analyzed using the Microsoft Excel spreadsheet program and some self-written histogram generation programs. Figures were constructed using gnuplot (www.gnuplot.info) and gimp (www.gimp.org) software.

Gender Percentage

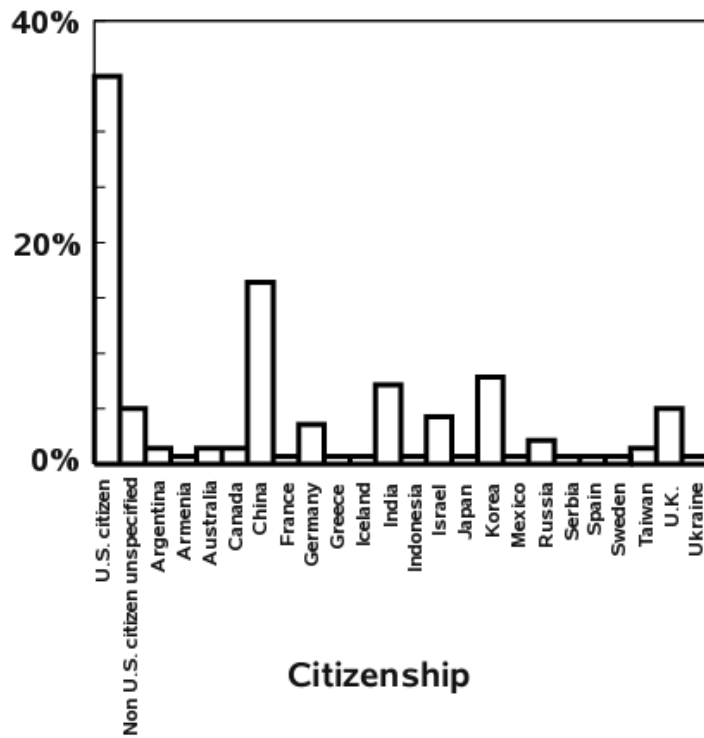
Question: What is your gender ?



The male:female ratio in the postdoc population is tilted towards the male population by 10%. Virtually the same male:female ratio was seen in the 2001 survey (56% to 43%).

Citizenship

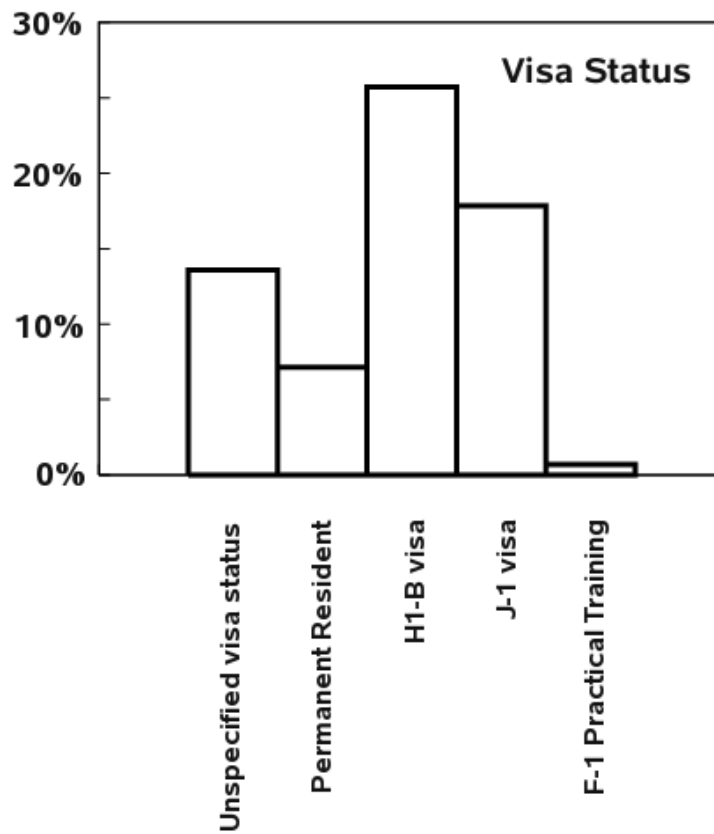
Question: What is your citizenship status ?



U.S. citizens form the single largest nationality of postdocs on campus, however, they amount to only 35% of the BSD postdoc population. A diverse range of nationalities contribute to the rest; the nations represented most are China, Korea, India, the U.K., and Israel.

Visa Status for Non-U.S. citizens

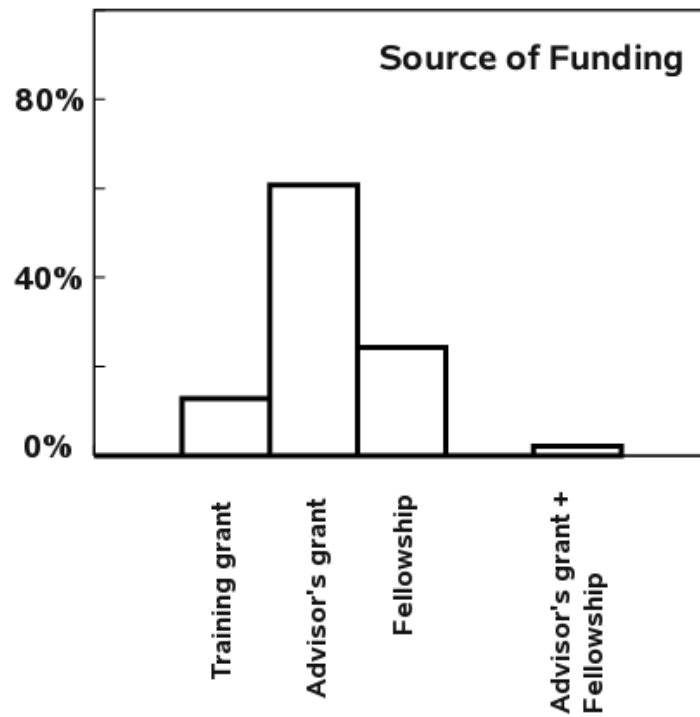
Question: What is your citizenship status ?



U.S. citizens account for about 35% of all postdocs, H1-B visa holders account for about 25%, J-1 visa holders for about 18%, and permanent residents for about 8%.

Funding Source

Question: What is the source of funding that supports you ?

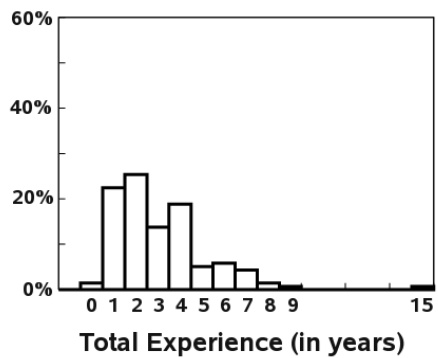
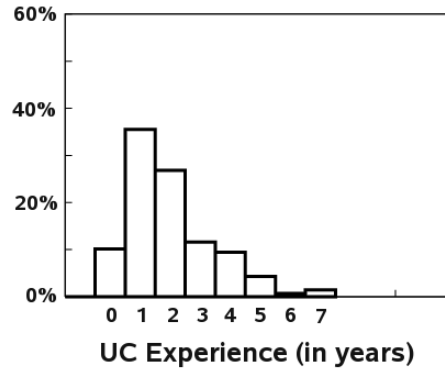
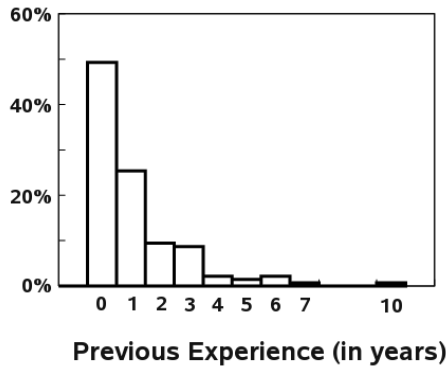


About 60% of postdocs are funded by their advisor's grants, 25% by fellowships and 15% by training grants.

Postdoctoral Experience

Question: In what year did you get your Ph.D. ?

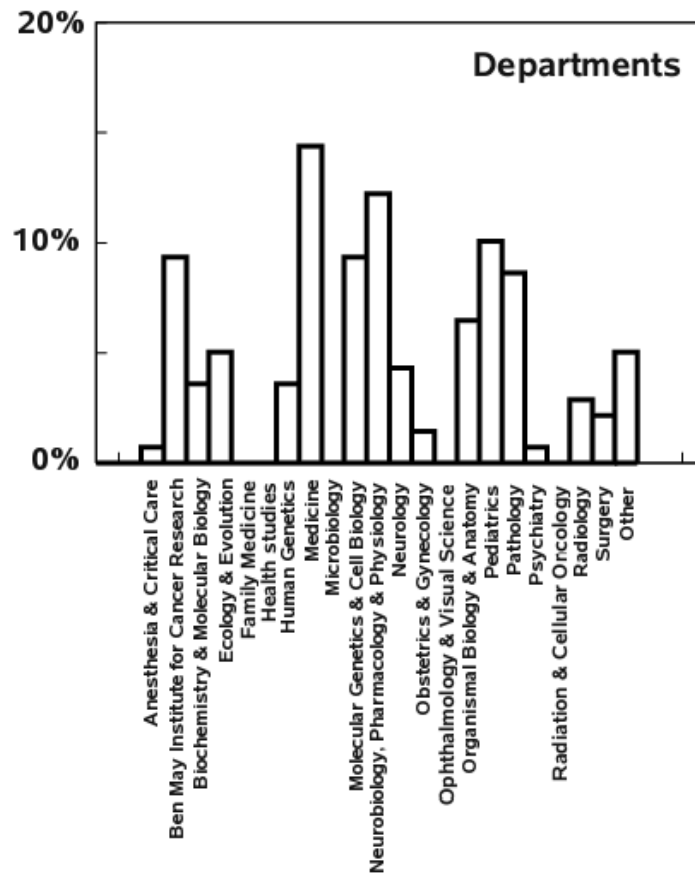
Question: When did you join University of Chicago as a postdoc ?



About half the postdoc population is hired right after their Ph.D., 25% after one year of their Ph.D., and slightly less than 10% each after 2 or 3 years of their Ph.D. About 70% of postdocs have gained up to 3 years of experience at University of Chicago. The distribution of total years of postdoc experience show two peaks at 2 years (about 25%) and 4 years (about 19%), possibly indicating presence of two populations on their first and second postdocs, respectively.

Departmental Breakdown

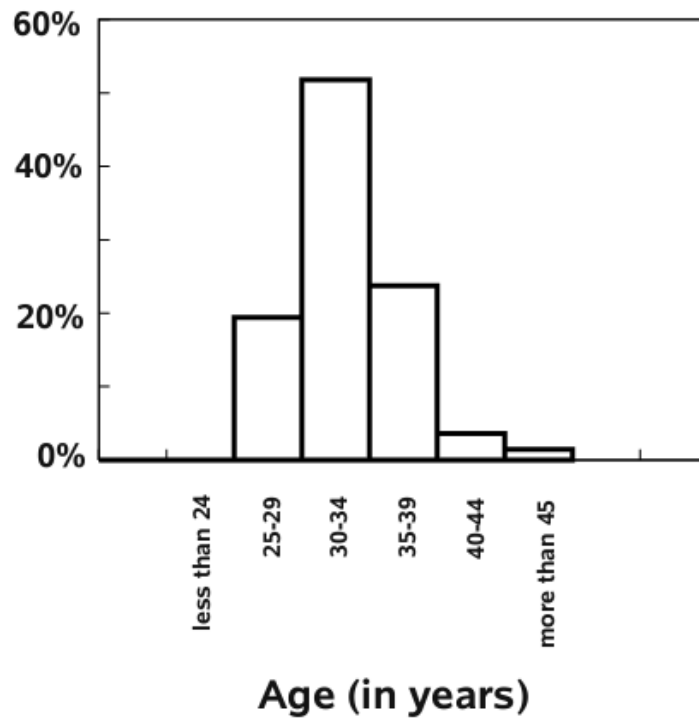
Question: Which department are you in ?



The departments of Medicine; Neurobiology, Pharmacology, and Physiology; and Pediatrics make up 10% or more of the survey respondents each. There were no survey respondents from Family Medicine; Health Studies; Microbiology; Ophthalmology and Visual Science; or Radiation and Cellular Oncology.

Age

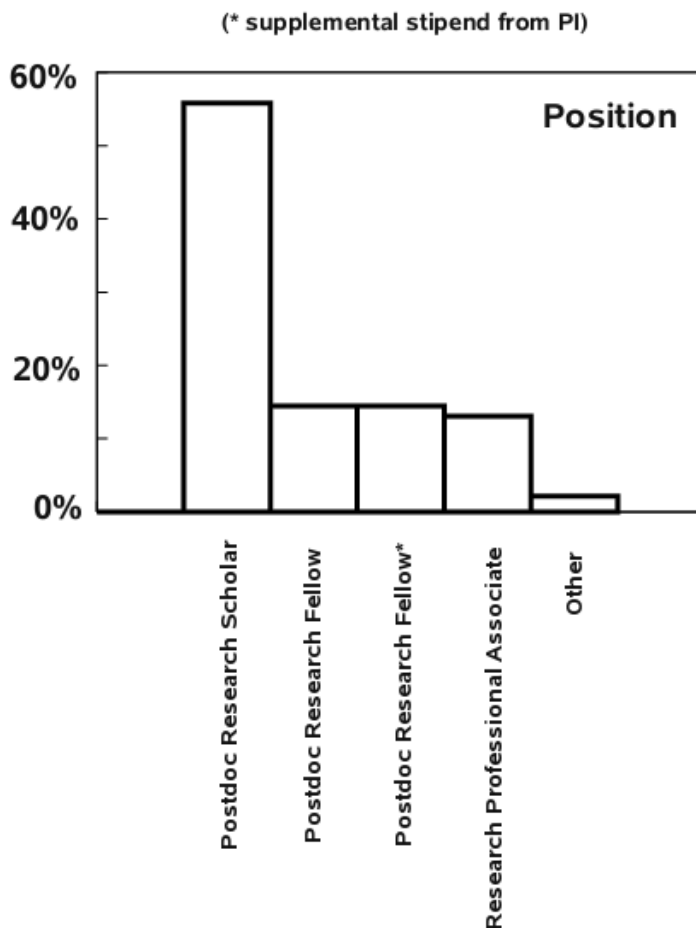
Question: Age group ?



About half of the postdocs are 30-34 years of age, about 20% are 25-29 years of age, and the rest are more than 35 years of age.

Position Title

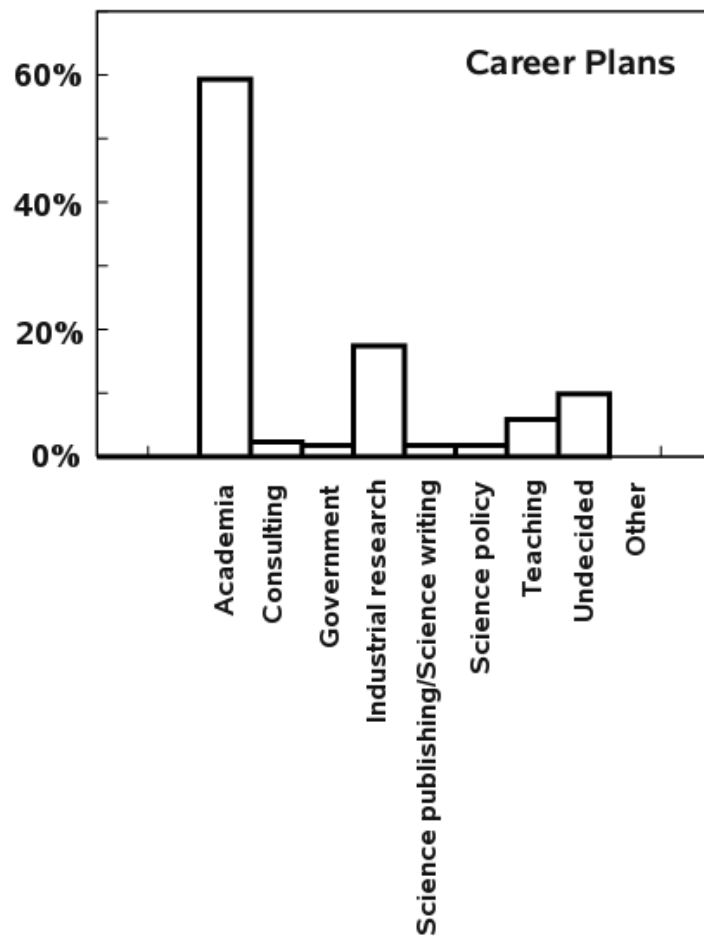
Question: What is your position title ?



About 55% of postdocs are postdoc research scholars, about 30% are postdoc research fellows, and less than 15% are research professional associates. Around 50% of Postdoctoral Research Fellows responded that they received a supplementary stipend from their adviser. Since January 2004, all Postdoctoral Research Fellows in the Biological Sciences Division should be provided an annual supplemental stipend to address the inequity in employee benefits between Postdoctoral Research Scholars and Fellows. The 50% of fellows who responded that they did not receive a supplementary stipend may be unaware of the stipend or may not be receiving it.

Career Plans

Question: What are your long-term career plans ?

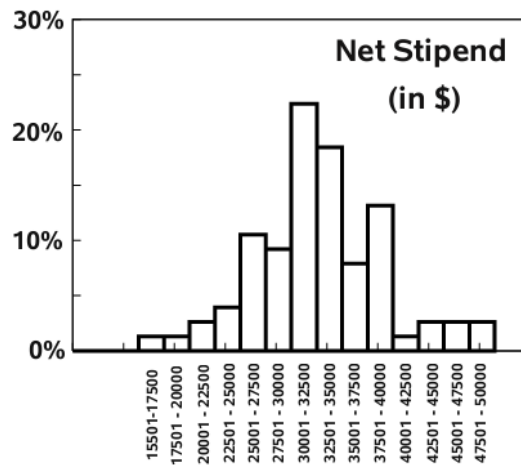
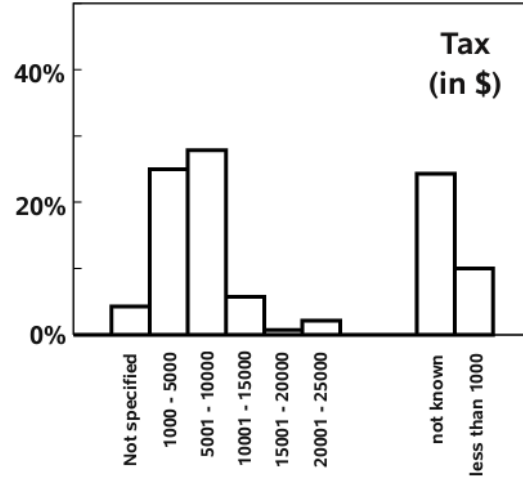
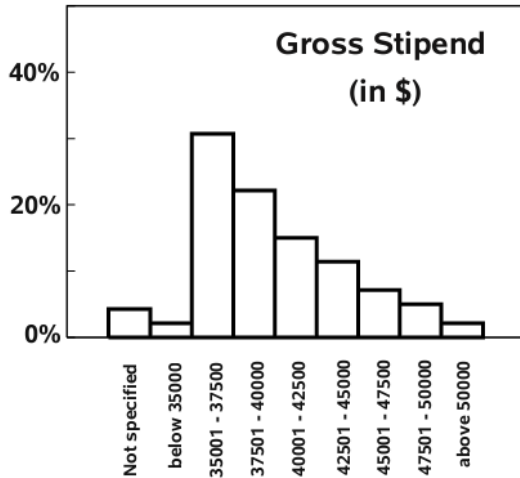


Most postdocs (about 60%) are interested in academic careers with the next favorite career choice being industry (just less than 20%).

Stipends

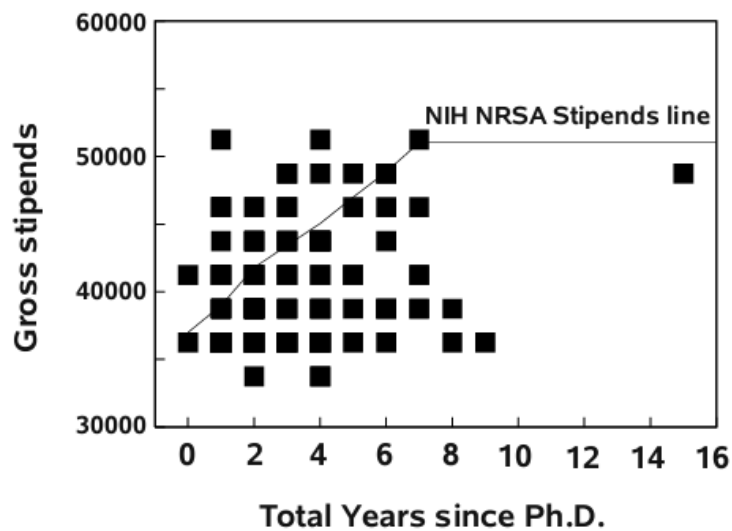
Question: What is your present gross (Pre-tax) stipend ?

Question: What are your total annual taxes (federal+state+local) ?

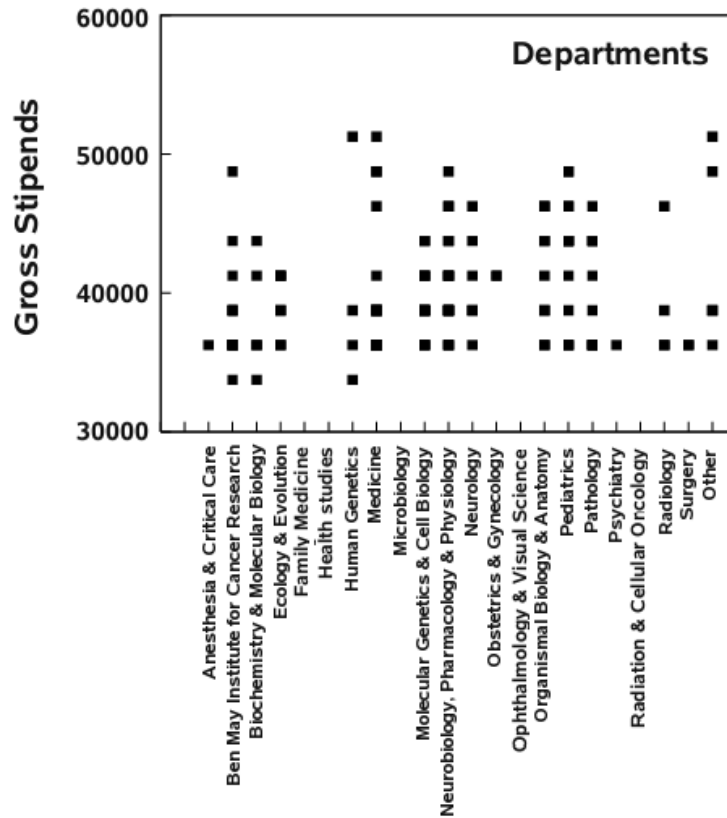


The most probable gross stipend is in the range of \$ 35,000 - 37,500, with a steady decrease in the number of people getting higher stipends. Net stipends (Gross stipends - Tax) show a normal distribution peaked at \$ 30,000 - 32,500.

Stipends, years of experience, departments

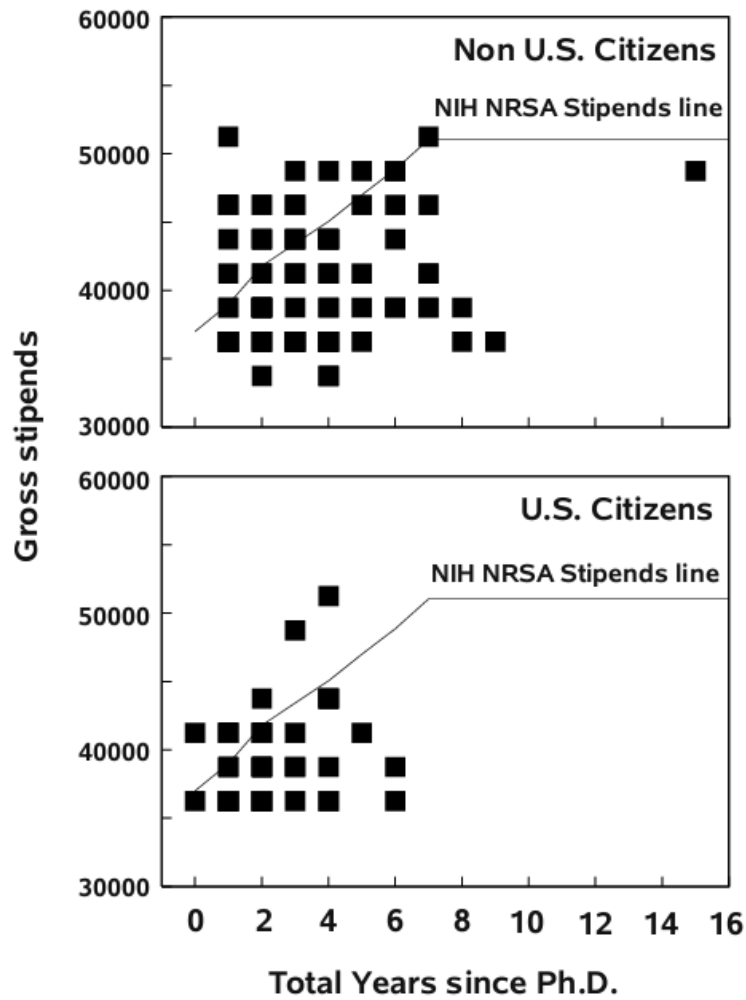


A plot of years of postdoc experience against gross stipends indicates a scatter around the 2006 NIH NRSA stipend scale line that suggests that a significant number of postdocs with more than 2 years experience receive smaller stipends in comparison with this scale.



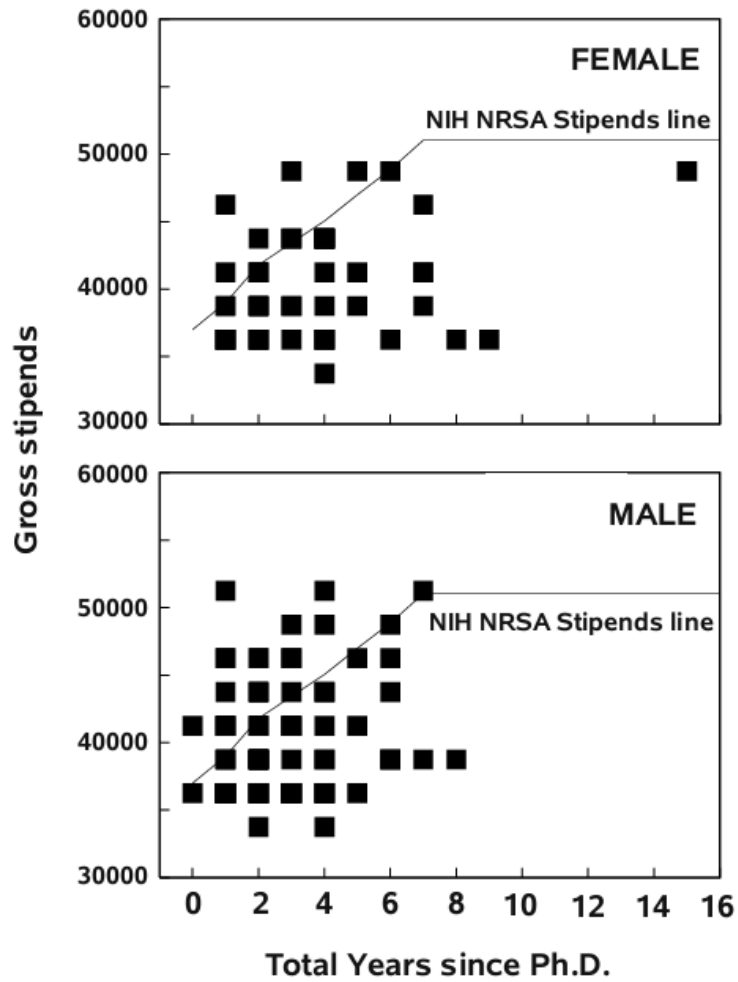
When broken down by department, it is clear that a few postdocs still seem to be paid less than \$ 35,000 in the departments of Ben May Institute for Cancer Research, Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, and Human Genetics. This is presumably because they were hired at the previous NIH zero year minimum stipend and received no stipend increases with experience gained.

Stipends and citizenship



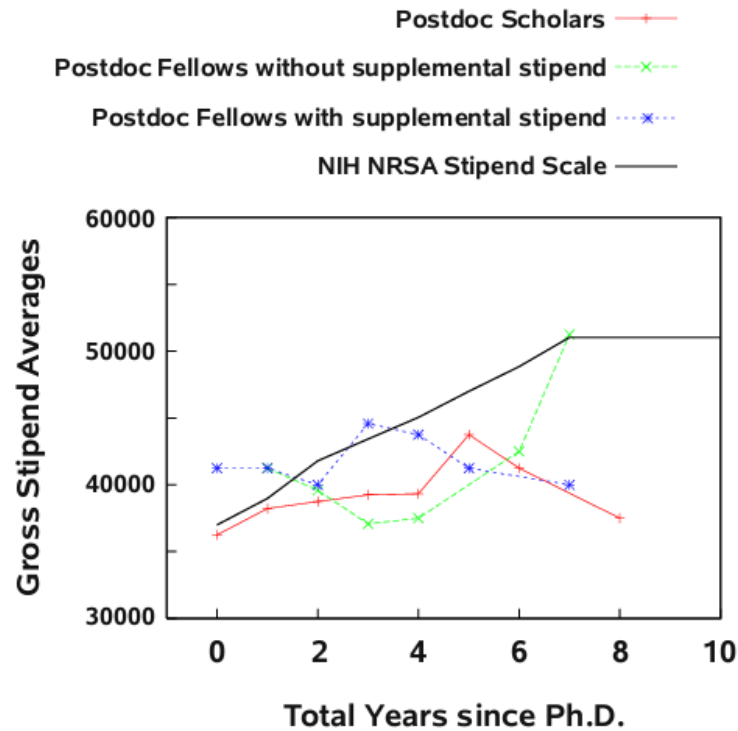
There is no clear trend that distinguishes between U.S. citizens and non-U.S. citizens when postdoc stipends are considered according to years of experience.

Stipends and gender



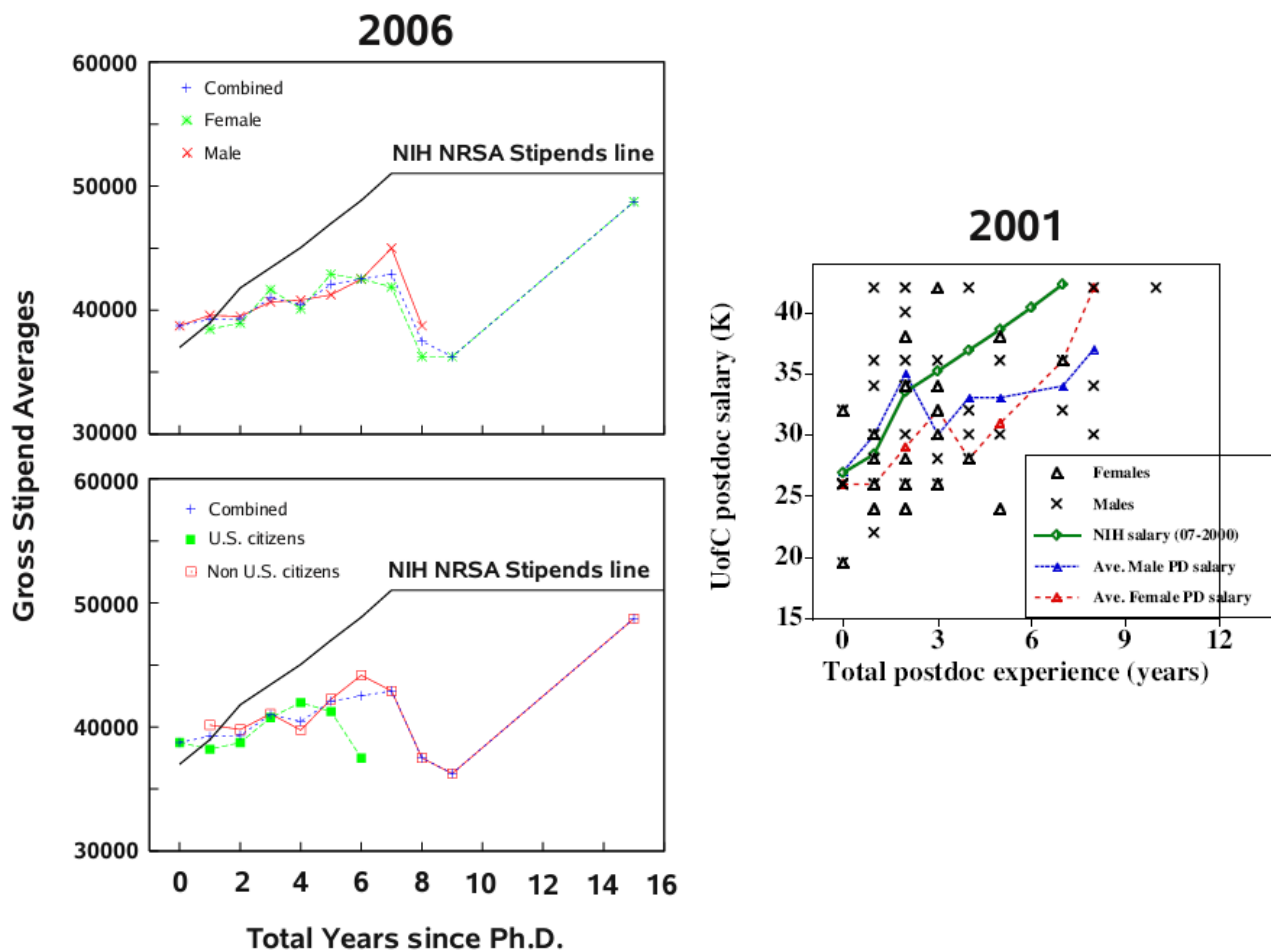
There is no clear trend that distinguishes between male and female postdocs when their stipends are considered according to years of experience.

Stipends and Type of position



On the average, postdoc fellows receive greater stipends than postdoc scholars, especially in the first two years of their postdoctoral research. Amongst postdoctoral fellows, the stipends are smaller for the third and fourth year of postdoc for those who do not receive a supplemental stipend.

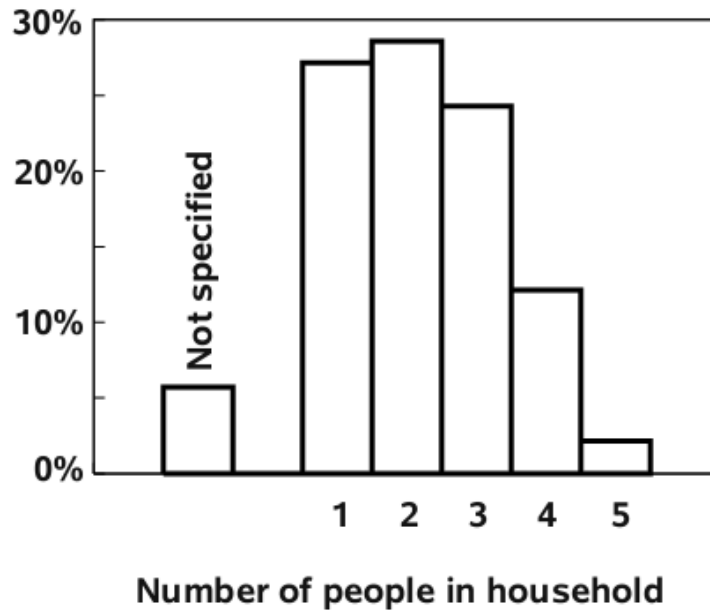
Average stipends and comparison to 2001 survey



The disparity between female and male postdoc stipends upto 2 years of experience seen in the 2001 survey is no longer present now. The average postdoc stipends follow the NIH NRSA stipend for the first two years after which they drop significantly below that scale for all the sub-categories. The effect of the NIH NRSA zero year mandatory stipend policy adopted by the Biological Sciences Division is also clearly visible in that postdocs receiving stipends below the zero year NIH NRSA stipend scale have reduced in number since 2001.

Household size

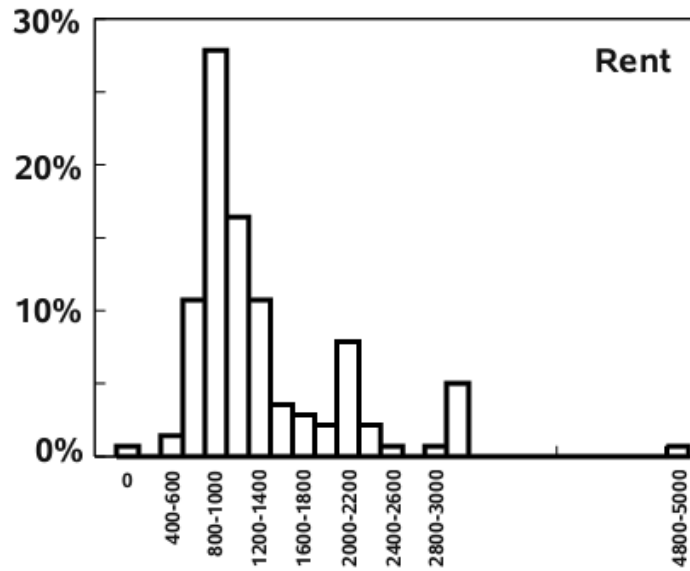
Question: Number of people in household (including yourself) ?



The number of people in postdoc households ranges from 1 to 5 with about 55% of postdoc households having 2 people or less.

Rent

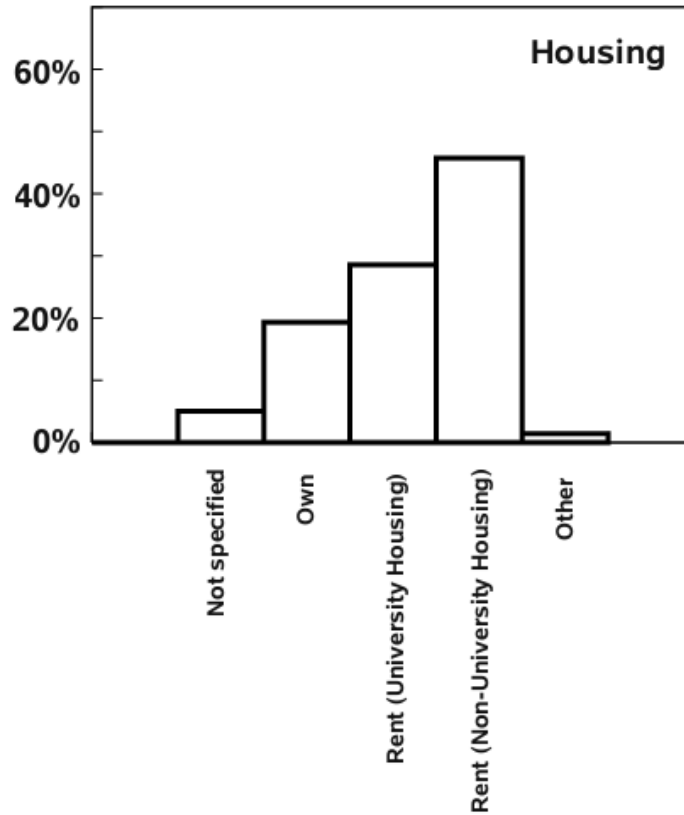
Question: What are your housing costs per month (in \$) ?



The housing costs peak between \$ 800 - \$ 1000 per month, but vary in a wide range.

Type of Housing

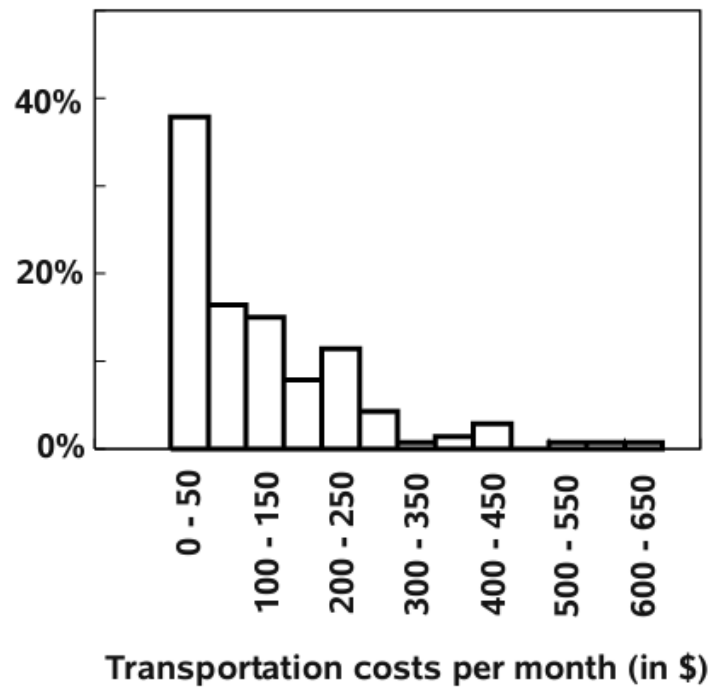
Question: Do you own or rent ?



About 45% of postdocs rent non-university housing, about 30% rent university housing, and about 20% own their housing.

Transportation Costs

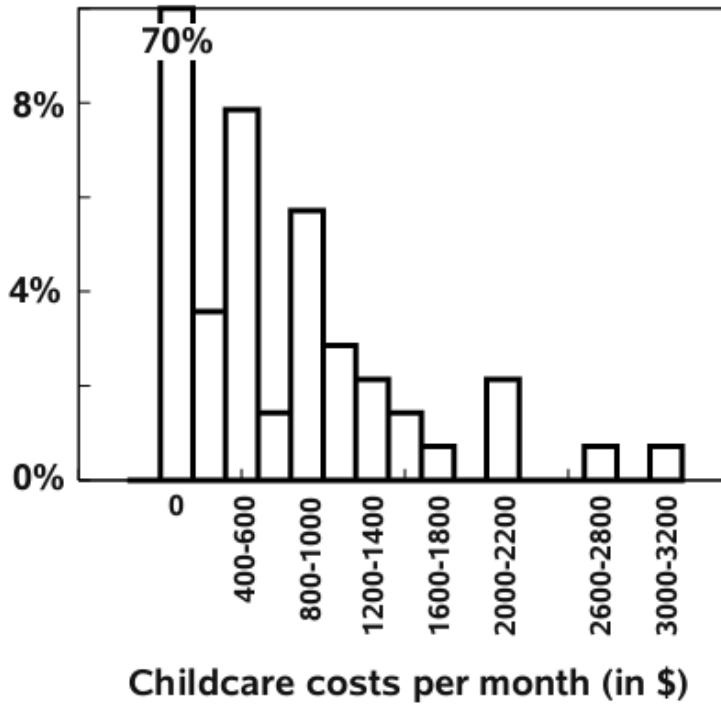
Question: What are your transportation costs per month including parking (in \$) ?



Although there is a large range in transportation costs per month for postdocs, many (close to 40%) spend between \$ 0 - 50 per month with steadily smaller numbers of postdocs spending larger amounts.

Childcare Costs

Question: What are your childcare costs per month (in \$) ?

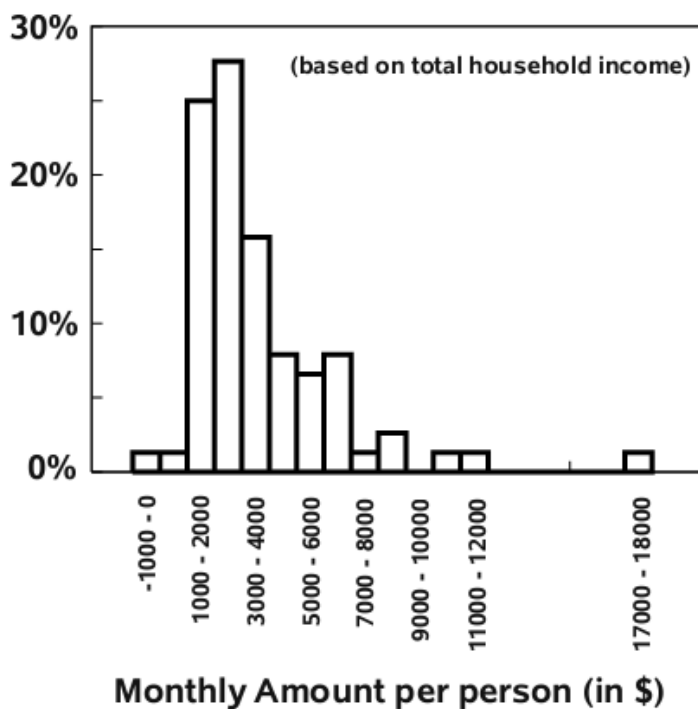


While most postdocs (about 70%) did not report childcare costs, those that did peaked in numbers around two ranges \$ 400 - 600, and \$ 800 - 1000 per month.

Monthly money left over per person in household

Question: Any additional family income (e.g. spouse income, stock dividends etc.)? Please specify net (after-tax) amount

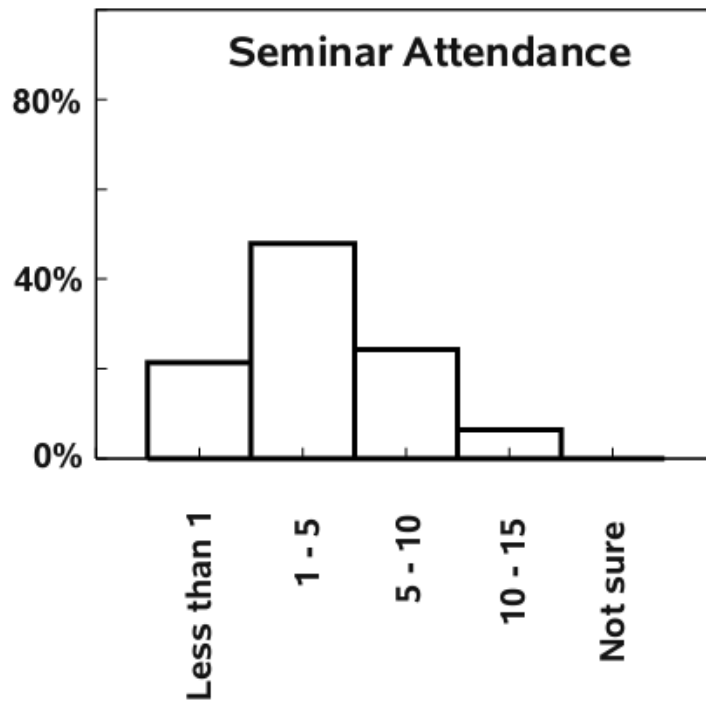
Monthly money left over per person in household = (annual gross salary + additional income - annual tax - 12×(monthly rent + monthly transportation cost + monthly childcare costs))/number of people in household



This rough measure based on the information obtained in this survey indicated that most postdoc households have \$ 2000 - \$ 3000 left over (after certain basic costs) per person per month.

Seminar Attendance

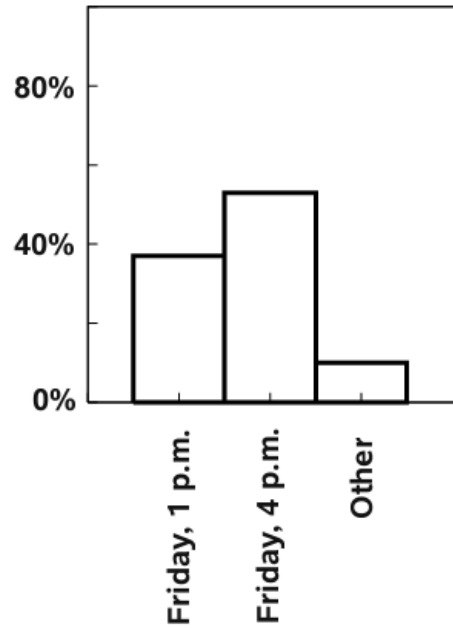
Question: How many seminars in the BSD postdoc seminar series did you attend ?



Most respondents have attended between 1 and 5 seminars in the Postdoc seminar series last year, and about 80% have attended at least one.

Preferred Seminar Time

Question: What is your preferred time for these seminars ?



The most desirable time for the seminar series was Friday at 4 p.m., followed by the other suggested time of Friday at 1 p.m. Only about 10% of postdocs preferred other times.

Preferred Seminar Series Topics

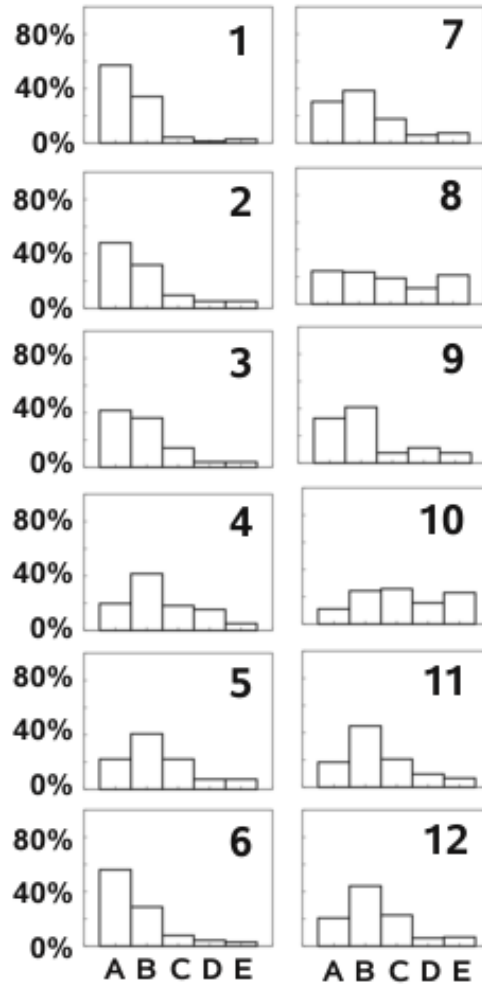
Question: Please rank the following seminar topic choices ?

Choices:

- 1 - Career guidance (academic)
- 2 - Career guidance (industry)
- 3 - Career guidance (alternative)
- 4 - Fellow postdoc research presentations
- 5 - Mentoring and lab management
- 6 - Funding opportunities
- 7 - Hiring and Benefits
- 8 - Immigration and Taxes
- 9 - Teaching and Presentation Skills
- 10 - Minorities in Science
- 11 - University resources (core facilities etc.)
- 12 - Social event instead of a seminar

Respondents showed most interest in the topics of Career guidance (academic), Career guidance (industry), Career guidance (alternative), and funding opportunities; and least interest in the topics of immigration and taxes or minorities in science.

Seminar Topic Choices



Ranks:

A = Very interested

B = Somewhat interested

C = No Opinion

D = Somewhat uninterested

E = Not interested

General Postdoc Concerns

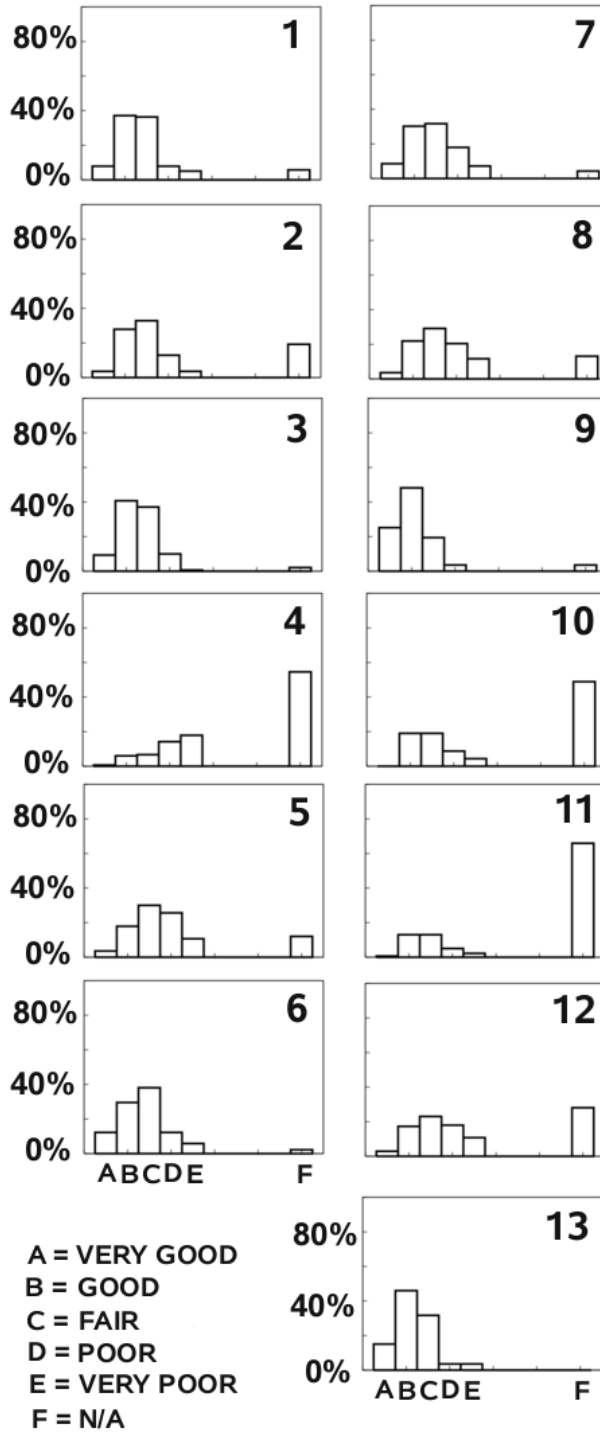
Question: Please rank University of Chicago's performance with respect to the following postdoc concerns:

Choices:

- 1 - Stipend
- 2 - Housing
- 3 - Health insurance and benefits
- 4 - Childcare support
- 5 - Transportation / Parking
- 6 - Mentoring (quality, availability, communication)
- 7 - Professional guidance
- 8 - Standardized evaluation of your research performance
- 9 - Laboratory research resources
- 10 - Conflict resolution
- 11 - Handling of discrimination issues
- 12 - Prevention of social isolation / stress
- 13 - Work environment

Among general postdoc concerns, University of Chicago Biological Sciences Division received a “good” to “fair” grade for most topics from a majority of the postdocs. The topic of childcare was the one exception where the grading was heavily tilted towards “very poor”. Another notable feature was that the topics of conflict resolution and discrimination had a majority of postdocs choosing “not applicable” as an option, perhaps suggesting a need for more information regarding these issues. The ideal distribution of grades is possibly the one seen for the topic of lab resources where the most likely grade is “good” with almost equal numbers of “very good” and “fair” grades around it.

Postdoc Concerns



Comments about the seminar series:

1. Add a seminar series that focuses on research opportunities at the regional (UIC, U Madison, etc).
2. I enjoy the series and think it has been a great mix of topics. I also think it is important that post-docs from different departments have a forum for interacting with one another. Keep up the good work!
3. They are well-organized and interesting. The post-doc association office holders are doing a great job!
4. Nice variety of speakers.
5. Good! I like the set up.
6. I find the Friday 4:00 time difficult to attend. A lunch time seminar would work better for me, or non-Fridays.
7. Well done.
8. So far so good.
9. Would love to see more seminars dedicated towards science teaching at the college level
10. A couple more academically oriented seminars, such as lab management would be nice.
11. Good.
12. Good job. Keep it going.
13. I have appreciated them, although events on Fridays at 4pm are not convenient for those of us who live outside Hyde Park.
14. It was good but too bad it wasn't very well attended.
15. It is an excellent resource for the postdoc community. The only resource of its kind, actually.

16. I liked all those seminars that were more involved in the scientist careers, but many of them I could not go because it was too early on Friday. Otherwise, I would prefer them to be very early, to be breakfast oriented rather than dinner. Unfortunately I could not go to any of the social events that the NPA at U of C offered.
17. They are very informative.
18. Give more chance to postdocs themselves.
19. I could never attend these sessions because of the time. Late afternoon on fridays are extremely difficult. I would prefer either another day, or earlier. If the event is a social, then a later start time would be better.
20. Time should be earlier than 4PM as it makes people who live in suburban area eager to come.
21. I found it informative.
22. Great Effort. Must stay on with the Postdoc presentations.
23. Everything was fine.
24. I really like having the seminars at 4 on friday because by then I've usually wrapped up most of my lab work for the day and I don't need to schedule ' experiments around it. Also I have really enjoyed the seminars career exploration/guidance and have found them very helpful for thinking about other opportunities in science.
25. I thought it was great – keep up the good work.
26. Would like to attend more interdisciplinary seminars, bio-physics, bio-engineering, bio-technology, nano-bio applications...

Comments about postdoc benefits:

1. In general I think they are very good. There needs to be a concrete definition of maternity/paternity leave. It is embarrassing this university remains so far behind the times on family issues.
2. The rent price and childcare price are too much for the postdoctoral Scholars. There are too few postdoctoral fellowship for person from foreign countries.
3. The UCHP health plan is really bad. It doesn't offer any support for visual problems, and is in general pretty badly managed.
4. Benefits? We have benefits?! Just kidding. They're about average, I guess.
5. I have still no dentist and the dental insurance ignores my complaint letters. I use my husband's health insurance.
6. It's good.
7. The difference between being on a training grant and being on a PI's grant (i.e. the difference between being a 'student' versus an 'employee' status) is huge in terms of benefits. There needs to be some way to lessen the gulf between these two groups of post-docs.
8. Health care is my first concern. After paying for family, it effectively knocks off \$ 10000 from my stipend.
9. Seems good.
10. Too low.
11. I do not understand why postdoc fellows cannot have the same benefits as postdoc scholars (employees). I had to change my health insurance from uchicago plan to HMO making it inconvenient for me to see a doctor (not many HMO doctors in Hyde Park). Also I cannot have retire plan as employees do.
12. I don't like the fact that post-docs being supported from a training grant are not eligible for the retirement benefits.

13. It would be great to have a web document concerning postdoc benefits in general.
14. As a postdoctoral scholar, I received benefits like any staff member, which is good. I realize the same is not true for postdoc fellows.
15. I do not want to participate in TIAA-CREFF plan, but cannot waive it.
16. I think it is ridiculous that as a fellow with outside funding they give me so little help with taxes and benefits. They get to keep my fellowship grant in their bank account earning interest while they dole it out to me each month, and yet they won't even help me withhold taxes from it or give me the option to use University of Chicago Health Plan. I am very disgruntled about the level of support we get with taxes especially. If they are making money of of my grant money that I obtained independently, I expect them to treat me as an employee as far as tax withholding is concerned.
17. Several, but they all are properly directed at the national level. Why does NIH dictate that fellows are not university employees, and lose benefits? I do not understand why this segment of the community is ignored, and at a critical juncture. Has academia and the NIH decided that the future of US biomed research is best served by this strategy? Myopia in policymakers is nothing new, but it seems academics should be somehow immune to such a damaging trajectory.
18. Treat me like an employee!!!! Sick of people saying 'oh, you're ONLY a postdoc. Could be better.
19. Absolutely no childcare anywhere in the University!
20. University associated child care facility would be extremely helpful. A welcome packet specifically for postdocs, including health care benefit options, vacation time allowance, sick days etc., information about the university in general, and any other information that may be helpful to a new postdoc could be useful. A tour of the university and introduction to faculty and other postdocs would be ideal, and would prevent postdoc isolation issues as well as alleviating stress about coming to a huge university.

21. UCHP should be offered as an insurance option for Postdoctoral Fellows. Postdoc need to use the Gym for free.
22. The benefits seem acceptable to me.
23. I wouldn't mind a little more flexibility in my health care plan.
24. Child care for Postdoc is a MUST.
25. I need to get more specific information about those.
26. I switched from being a postdoc scholar and paid from my PI's grant to being a postdoc fellow when I got a fellowship. While its a great opportunity, I lost some of my university benefits. First, I can no longer use the UCHP as my health insurance which means no nationally ranked heathcare at good prices. I can still participate in the HMO Illinois so I could still see a doctor at the UC if I took the PPO option, but that cost \$ 5000 a year which is too expensive. Second, I can no longer contribute to my university retirement account. Third, I can no longer participate in a flexible savings account or dependent care account. While getting this fellowship has been great professionally, it does have its drawbacks financially which I think is detrimental to the university encouraging postdocs to apply for these prestigious outside awards.
27. Do we get vision coverage?
28. Take some course.
29. Very few doctors accept my HMO – only one practice in my town.
30. I think they are fine and sufficient.

General Comments:

1. It would be nice to know if Post-docs qualify for reduced cost or free counseling services. Some universities treat post-docs like students and are eligible, whereas others do not. I do not know the UofC's policy or available resources on this.
2. Really glad that PDA exists!
3. Even though I don't attend many of the Post-doc association's seminars, I'm glad to get the announcements and think that most of the series they run are a very good idea.
4. I think the PDA is doing a great job.
5. One critical thing is that the university does not like to support immigration petitions for us. We need this kind of help!!!
6. I prefer some social events.
7. BSD postdoc is very good and helpful program.
8. Discrimination as a woman is a serious issue and a major problem, conflicts are not solved and the postdoc has the disadvantage, there is no 3rd party offer and security if paid from a grant and not by an independent fellowship.
9. I think academia is way behind the times. Postdocs are treated like glorified grad students and in some cases much worse. Mentoring is in most cases is non-existent.
10. Generally good.
11. As a non-US citizen, I find that there is very little or no support from the International affairs office. I have been misinformed regarding visa information and the fact that it takes two weeks turnaround to get an answer to a question is unacceptable. I would like to see a better communication between the University and foreign post-docs (and since we comprise a huge number of the post-docs on campus, I am shocked at how appallingly bad we are handled). Also, it has been difficult to obtain tax information for foreign post-docs that obtain (partial) salaries from outside of the US.

12. Inviting other scientists related to our research.
13. I am a member of the postdoc association.
14. Life is good as a U of C post-doc!
15. How can people, like me, update his/her profile throughout the campus in case he/she changed his/her address, telephone number etc.?"
16. BSD PDA is doing a great job. I hope PDA can provide more future career guidances, job fair information and establish more connections with academic or industrial employers.