

BSD PDA Survey 2006 Summary

Biological Sciences Division Postdoctoral Association

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Summary

The results of the survey are subjectively summarized below as a set of statistical descriptions. The data can, however, be viewed more objectively in the figures in the full report.

General characteristics

The male:female ratio in the postdoc population is tilted towards the male population by 10%. About 35% of postdocs are U.S. citizens, the rest are non-citizens of diverse nationalities. Amongst the non-citizens, H1-B visa holders account for about 25%, J-1 visa holders for about 18%, and permanent residents for about 8%. About 60% of postdocs are funded by their advisor's grants, 25% by fellowships and 15% by training grants. 50% of postdocs are 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 upto 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. The departments of Medicine; Neurobiology, Pharmacology, and Physiology; and Pediatrics make up 10% or more of the survey respondents each, on the other hand, there were no survey respondents from Family Medicine; Health Studies; Microbiology; Ophthalmology and Visual Science; or Radiation and Cellular Oncology. Most postdocs (about 50%) are 30-34 years of age and only about 20% are 25-29 years of age. About 55% of postdocs are postdoc research scholars, about 30% are postdoc research fellows, and less than 15% are research professional associates. Most postdocs (about 60%) are interested in academic careers with the next favorite career choice being industry (just less than 20%).

Stipends

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. 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. Breakdown of this scatter plot according to gender and citizenship do not show any clear trends that can distinguish between male and female postdocs or U.S. citizens and non-citizens. 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. 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. 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. 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.

Living costs

The number of people in postdoc households ranges from 1 to 5 with about 55% of postdoc households having 2 people or less. The housing costs per month peak in the range of \$ 800 - \$ 1000. About 45% of postdocs rent non-university housing, about 30% rent university housing, and about 20% own their housing. 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. 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. A 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 series

Most respondents have attended between 1 and 5 seminars in the Postdoc seminar series last year, and about 80% have attended at least one. The most desirable time for the seminar series was Friday at 4 p.m. 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.

Postdoc concerns

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.

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.