

## Recommendations for Action Points from BSD Postdoctoral Survey 2007

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### Immediate Action Points:

1.) The 2007 survey identified many instances in which the postdoctoral community is unaware of services and/or facilities offered to them both from the University of Chicago and from our PDA. As an example, almost 64% postdocs are not aware that the Office of Research Services (ORS) is a resource available to them to aid in their career development. As for the PDA, more than one-third of the postdoctoral community responded that they either did not know that the PDA website existed or that they have never visited the site. The PDA website can and should be an effective tool to fulfill the mission of the PDA by acting as a central source of information for our fellow postdocs. **In order to ensure that all postdocs can benefit from the available resources, we recommend the following measures:** **1)** The creation of a BSD postdoctoral association brochure encompassing pertinent information on the following topics: a) the BSD PDA, including, but not limited to, organization of the steering committee, PDA website information, the seminar series, and workshops and symposia directed by the PDA, b) a detailed and current list of facilities and services available at the University of Chicago, and c) detailed organizational chart of the University; **2)** Permanent informational PDA flyers containing website information to be posted in strategic areas, as well as to be given to Human Resources representatives to hand out to incoming postdocs upon arrival at the University.

2) Respondents reported that less than half of the postdoc community has written grant applications (e.g. postdoctoral fellowship applications) while at the University of Chicago. However, nearly 80% intend to write a grant application at some point during their postdoctoral training. Along these lines, an overwhelming majority of postdocs indicate that they would benefit from workshops tailored to strengthening their abilities to write grant applications. Despite this fact and that securing funding is a major stepping-stone in postdoctoral training, grant writing workshops have been scarce in the University community. **Our recommendation is to work together with the University of Chicago Office of Research Services to establish a yearly grant writing workshop.** We envision an extensive course detailing the following: 1) grant applications available to the postdoctoral community, 2) the process of moving grant applications through the ORS, as well as 3) content-oriented discussions. To augment the discussions of content and organization of grant applications, junior and senior faculty's presence at the workshop will be requested. Related to this specific workshop, nearly 80% of the postdoctoral community reported an interest in a course on independent lab management. The grant writing workshop could easily be transitioned into a subset of a much larger course detailing the responsibilities of a tenure-track professor and should be a long-term goal of the PDA.

3) The 2007 PDA survey results indicate that less than 20% of postdocs received a performance evaluation in the past year. Performance evaluation is a necessary and beneficial process and should ideally be two-way. For postdocs, it provides a solid review of key expectations, quality of performance standard, and directions for future changes. An annual performance evaluation encourages periodic and structured communication between postdocs and their advisors and should take place throughout the term of employment. **We recommend establishing a guideline by which postdocs can receive communicative feedback from their advisors on a yearly basis.** We will use the Performance Evaluation given to Research Professional Associates as a template for such a guideline.

### Long-term Action Points:

1) Disseminate information concerning alternative careers in the sciences to the BSD community.

-Academia continues to represent the major career ambition for the BSD postdoctoral community (55%), although this number is slightly down from last year (60%) and well down from 2001, in which between 65-90% of postdocs responded that staying in academics in some capacity was their first or second career choice. Industrial research has been replaced by Undecided as the second most popular response in this year's survey. Perhaps the rise in Undecided respondents and the fall in Academia respondents stems from growing concerns about the potential success of gaining a career in academia, and the uncertainty of other possibilities. In fact, the vast majority of postdocs perceive the job market in academia to be fair to poor, while the market outside of academia is perceived as fair to good. The desire to attain a career in academia, stemming both from internal and external pressures, may be overriding the probability of garnering such a career. The reality of the job market is that only a very small minority of postdocs will end up in tenure-track positions (current estimates stand at 10-15% of PhDs 5-10 years post-thesis), and respondents appear to have a grasp on this. As a PDA representing the voice of hundreds of BSD postdocs, we need to better inform postdocs of the many potential careers that are available to them. Because of the disparity in length of postdoctoral terms between US versus non-citizens, this is particularly true for non-citizen postdocs. **In collaboration with the CAPS office, our recommendation will be to institute a yearly career symposium in which PhD's from all the different career paths come to give informative talks on their respective career(s).** This could draw not only postdocs from the BSD community, but also graduate students, undergraduates, and members of the PSD and would augment the weekly seminar series already established through the PDA.

2) Work with the University of Chicago to institute a childcare facility in the Hyde Park area.

-Of those postdocs who have children, 35% responded that they do not have any costs associated with childcare. The remaining specified an average cost of around \$950/month in childcare costs, with the low end reported as \$100/month and the high end at \$2500/month. Taking into account the fact that the average stipend for postdocs with children is around \$40,000/year, childcare costs potentially represent greater than one-third of a postdoc's income. Because two-thirds of the postdoctoral community lives in the University's neighborhood, there is an obvious need for more affordable childcare offered by the University in the Hyde Park area.

3) Create Teaching Opportunities.

-77% of US citizens have teaching experience compared with only 55% of non-US citizens. Postdoc training positions typically do not have any assignments to teach a class. Yet many postdocs aspiring to remain in academia or transitioning to faculty positions in Colleges would benefit greatly from experience in teaching at this stage. An overwhelming majority of postdocs expressed interest in obtaining teaching experience (nearly 80%).

4) Create an Ombudsperson or Counselor specifically for postdocs together with the implementation of a Formal Grievance Resolution Procedure.

-In the entire postdoc community, as many as 40% postdocs have experienced grievances at work. Broken down by citizenship status, only 20% of US citizens reported to have faced grievances compared to more than 40% of non-US citizens. In addition, as many as 46% postdocs state that they would benefit from a counselor other than their advisor to resolve potential conflicts.

Points of Concern Raised from the 2007 Survey:

Several troubling statistics emerged from the analysis of the 2007 PDA survey that merit further analyses in future surveys and beyond.

1) Determine the reasons for the disparity in salary between male and female postdocs. When stipend level is plotted against years since receiving PhD to compare male versus female postdocs, a clear trend is visible: **female postdocs are more likely to receive a smaller stipend when compared with male postdocs possessing the same number of years of experience.** The only exception to this trend occurs in postdocs with eight or more years of experience. Here, female postdocs are more likely to receive higher compensation than their male counterparts. As a PDA, we need to better understand the reason(s) for this disparity. Does this represent discrimination at the level of the advisor(s), the department(s), and/or the division, or are there justifiable reasons for the differences (e.g. less work experience)?

2) Determine factors preventing postdocs from attending PDA seminars in spite of their stated level of interest. Approximately 25-30 seminars are held by the BSD-PDA each year. Only 15% of respondents can claim that they have attended as many as 5-10 seminars, while another 45% can claim at least one up to 5 attendances. Surprisingly, 36% of postdocs state that they have not attended a single seminar. The BSD-PDA seminars are especially geared towards the professional development of postdocs during their training phase. Many of the seminars are designed to offer invaluable information and advice regarding a wide variety of topics for the benefit of the postdoc community. Despite the attendance record, the survey data clearly indicate moderate to strong interest in ALL of the topics presented in the PDA seminars.

#### Points of which the PDA Needs to Raise Awareness:

1) Raise awareness of implementing a career plan as well as a research plan (*i.e.* AAMC Postdoc and Mentor Compact) at the beginning of postdoctoral training. A quarter of all postdocs have not had a discussion about their research or career plan with their advisor. Postdocs who have research/career plans seem equally divided in having or not having individual commitments detailed in their plans. For the 26% postdocs who have no plans, the question of detailing obligations is moot.

2) Raise awareness for the necessity of building a relationship with a non-peer mentor. 37% of the entire postdoc population report that they have a non-peer mentor other than their advisors. A significant difference is apparent when broken down by citizenship status: 60% of US citizens report having a non-peer mentor while only 30% non-US citizens claim the same. While it is beneficial to have a successful mentor relationship with the faculty advisor who serves as a research guide among other key roles, it is equally important to have a non-peer mentor with whom one can share concerns and discuss ideas without the possibility of a conflict of interest.

3) Facilitate professional development, name recognition, network development, exchange of scientific knowledge and training in public speaking by organizing a wider platform to present research work. 18% of postdocs currently have no platform to present their research work on a regular basis. Although 82% of postdocs state that they have a platform to present their research work, a majority of these presentations are not beyond their immediate surroundings, such as in a lab meeting.