

# A Voice for Postdocs: *The National Postdoctoral Association*

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September 26, 2008*

empowering postdocs ~ enhancing research





# Overview

- NPA Background
- Postdoctoral Overview
- Recent Postdoc History
- National Postdoc Trends
- Focus on Mentoring
- Postdoc Resources



# NPA Background

## *Empowering Postdocs ~ Enhancing Research*

*The mission of the National Postdoctoral Association is to advance the U.S. research enterprise by maximizing the effectiveness of the research community and enhancing the quality of the postdoctoral experience for all participants.*

### Activities in four main areas:

- Advocacy
- Resources
- Outreach
- Meetings



# NPA Advocacy

- Official postdoc definition
- Stipend & benefit increases
- New career award
- Mentoring on research grants
- White Paper on Visa Reform
- Tracking legislation on competitiveness/innovation; immigration, agency reauthorizations
- Institutional Policies
  - More than 160 research institutions have adopted portions of NPA's Recommended Practices
  - FASEB/AAMC Statement on Postdoc Benefits
  - Recommended Practices for Professional Societies



# NPA Resources

- Postdoc Data Collection
- Database of Institutional Policies
- International Postdoc Survival Guide
- Diversity Clearinghouse
- Toolkits for Postdoc Associations & Offices
- Work with GREAT Group to develop Compact on Postdoc Training
- Core Competencies for Postdocs
- PDA/PDO resources



# NPA Outreach & Meetings

- NPA Job Board
- Website
- Newsletter & E-mail Alerts
- Speaker's Bureau
- Toolkit/Workshops on Responsible Conduct of Research
- Co-sponsorship of a legal seminar series for international postdocs
- The NPA has represented postdocs at more than 200 national and regional meetings since 2003
- 7th Annual Meeting in Houston, April 2009



# Postdoc Defined

- Postdoc
  - Holds doctoral degree
  - Temporary mentored research/training
  - Pursue career path of choice
- Ideal Postdoc Appointment
  - Skill development → career independence
  - Senior supervisor promoting development
  - Individual Development Plan
  - Primary focus on research
  - Publication of research
  - Not to exceed 5 years
  - Adequate compensation/benefits



# Postdoc Statistics - people

- >50,000 postdocs in US
- Most in life/health sciences
- 42% women
- 78% Caucasian (US-based postdocs)
- 60% postdocs international
- 58% aged 30-35, 10% > 40
- 69% married/partnered
- 34% have children



# Postdoc Statistics - dollars

- 70% funded by US government
- \$38,000 median salary ~\$14.90/hour
- \$36,000 for Internationals
- 46% live in most expensive areas
- 92% have access to health insurance
- 40% have access to retirement benefits
- 25% have access to child care benefits



# Postdoc Statistics - outcomes

- 3.8 years per postdoc
- 43% don't consider postdoc training
- 24% don't consider advisors to be mentors
- 62% seek training in grants
- 40% seek career development
- 43% 1<sup>st</sup> authors in *Science*
- 53% engaged in grant writing



# Tenure Track Facts

- 60% seek tenure-track academic positions
- ~20% obtain tenure-track academic positions
- 70% academic new hires w/o tenure-track
- PhD Scientists in Tenure Track
  - 1963 - 61%
  - 1973 - 57%
  - 1991 - 45%
  - 2001 - 38%
- Most postdocs end up in 'alternative' careers



# Recent Postdoc History

- 1998 - Association of American Universities Report
- 2000 - National Academies' Committee on Science, Engineering, and Public Policy Report
- 2003 - NPA Founded
- 2004-2005
  - Sigma Xi Survey
  - National Academies' Bridges to Independence Report
  - NPA Recommended Practices Issued
- 2006
  - American Association of Medical Colleges 'Compact' issued
- 2007
  - Postdoc formally defined/accepted
  - Postdoc mentoring provisions approved
- 2008
  - NPA Research Integrity program



# National Postdoc Trends

- Issues
  - Increasing numbers of postdocs
  - Stagnant federal funding
  - Decreased availability of tenure-track
  - Increasing age/time in postdoc
- Solutions
  - Access to professional development resources
  - Utilization of Individual Development Plans
  - Provision of “structured oversight”
  - Action by multiple stakeholders



# Current NPA Efforts

- Implementation of NSF mentoring provision
- Development of a second national postdoc survey
- Enhanced data collection/reporting
- Assisting PDAs and PDOs in addressing issues locally



# Focus on Postdoc Mentoring

- Mentor: experienced adviser, supporter
  - Career counseling
  - Grant writing
  - Teaching skills
  - Research ethics
- Mentors crucial in postdoc career development
- Train faculty for improved mentoring
- Educate postdocs to identify good mentors



# Individual Development Plan

- IDP Defined
  - Unique training and career goals
  - Improvement/maturation needed to achieve goals
  - Specific steps to achieve goals
- Those with a plan were
  - more satisfied
  - more productive
  - less likely to have conflict with PI



# AAMC Compact

- Compact Between Postdoc & Mentors
- Core Tenets of Postdoctoral Training
  - Institutional Commitment
    - Ensure successful training period
    - Oversight of training period
  - Quality Postdoctoral Training
    - Research and ethical training
    - Skills outside the laboratory
  - Importance of Mentoring in Postdoctoral Training
    - Substantial time required of mentor
    - Define attributes of good mentor
  - Foster Breadth and Flexibility in Career Choices
    - Prepared for range of career options
    - Required of mentor and institution



# NPA Recommended Practices

- Establish postdoc policies
  - Utilize centralized appointment process
  - Establish curriculum for postdoctoral training
  - Provide equal access to benefits regardless of funding source
  - Establish time frame for postdoctoral transition to independence
  - Establish a minimum baseline stipend, plus a stipend scale
  - Conduct an entry/exit interview
  - Allow matched contributions to a retirement program
  - Extend family-friendly benefits to all postdocs
- Establish PDO that actively engages postdocs
- Facilitate effective mentoring and personal responsibility
- Maintain office for international scholar services
- Create and disseminate postdoc handbook
- Offer career development/transition services



# Thank you!

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