**Ask Adam**

**QUESTION:** I recently heard from friends that it has become more difficult to be sponsored for a “green card” as an “Outstanding Researcher” or to be classified as a “Scientist of Extraordinary Ability.” Is this true?

**ANSWER:** Yes, the immigration offices in both Lincoln, Nebraska, and Dallas, Texas, have dramatically raised the eligibility benchmark in the last six months. The reason is unknown, but one may assume that it is connected to the overall unemployment figures in the United States. Immigration adjudicators are now asking for far more evidence from the applicant than they have in the past.

For example, formerly, in order to be classified as an “Outstanding Researcher” the applicant had to have four or five publications in print. Now, immigration wants to see that you already have approximately nine or ten publications in print.

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**NATIONAL POSTDOC Appreciation Day**

September 24, 2009, was the first ever National Postdoc Appreciation Day. This day was designated by the National Postdoctoral Association in hopes that postdocs will be celebrated annually. To this regard, the inaugural annual day of recognition was celebrated by more than 70 institutions across the U.S.

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*Who’s Looking Out for Postdocs?*

Postdoctoral scholars make up a large portion of the research enterprise at any established university. The more than 6,400 postdocs in the UC system amount to 8-10% of the total postdocs in the U.S.

Until recently, postdocs everywhere went largely unnoticed as a significant part of the academic community. The UC COGD has long had administrative oversight of postdoc matters on nearly all UC campuses, although at UC Berkeley and UC San Diego, postdocs are technically overseen by the Vice Chancellor for Research. Accordingly, as early as

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Know It All?!  
Editor's Column By Natalia M. Belfiore

In her article “Mind Matters: In Defense of Downtime,” December 04, 2009, in Science Careers, Irene Levine argues that workaholics are likely to be less productive and less content with their jobs. This is not just her opinion—she cites a study recently published in the Harvard Business Review, by Perlow and Porter, as well as multiple other studies and observations. The prevailing view seems to be that having predetermined time off or an end-of-the-workday tends to increase focus and efficiency, and overall, enhances the ability of individuals to work well with his or her colleagues. Vacations are good, but not sufficient. ([http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/career_magazine/previous_issues/articles/2009_12_04/caredit.a0900149](http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/career_magazine/previous_issues/articles/2009_12_04/caredit.a0900149))

A recent survey of over 700 postdoc supervisors, conducted by the Science Careers division of AAAS, indicated high concern about the probability and time it may take for postdocs to find a job. Postdocs are spending, on average, slightly less time as postdocs in recent years, largely due to new time limits associated with many funding sources. But it is taking longer to find a job. Nevertheless, there is evidence of a trend for greater postdoc fellowship availability in some countries, as well as larger salaries and more benefits, all of which are accompanied by clearer definitions of the postdoctorate. [see “The Evolving Postdoctoral Experience” by Laura Bonetta; www.sciencecareers.org/businessfeatures]

Women make up half the graduates and postgraduates in biological sciences in the US and many countries in Asia and Europe, but only 19% of tenured NIH staff, and 25% of NIH grant recipients. In the U.S., only 26% of applicants for tenure track jobs are women, in spite of a 45% female Ph.D. rate. This editorial cites studies pointing toward some obvious benefits of a gender-balanced faculty, and some factors that discourage women from staying in academia. [Attracting Women, Nature Cell Biology 11, 915, 2008]

As if that isn’t bad enough, Ben Gose speculates that the deep budget cuts that have shrunk programs and the number of administrators at universities across the country this year will have a disproportionately high impact on underrepresented faculty, students, and staff. [Diversity Takes a Hit During Tough Times, October 11, 2009, Chronicle of Higher Education]

There may be some legal recourse, however. Dr. Marc Goulden and colleagues recently published a large study on women and sciences and some of their conclusions point to the need for compensatory action on the part of universities under Title IX.[http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2009/11/pdf/women_and_sciences.pdf). That connection is laid out in an essay by the study’s co-author, Mary Ann Mason, in a recent editorial [Title IX Includes Maternal Discrimination, The Chronicle of Higher Education, November 19, 2009]

According to Susan Hockfield of the Wall Street Journal, U.S. conservative immigration policies hurt American progress and competitive ability on the world stage. She argues “that we need the kind of broad new immigration policy that would allow foreign students who earn advanced degrees in science, technology, engineering and math to easily become legal permanent residents” in this global environment. [http://online.wsj.com/article/SB100014240527487043200457477700761571592.html?mod=googlenews-wsj]

This column is a regular feature of the UC Postdoc Newsletter. It will feature brief comments and notices about articles, events, and resources that are of interest to postdocs.

INVITATION TO SUBMIT:
The UC Postdoc Newsletter invites contributions from any UC postdoc, as well as administrators, faculty, or other UC personnel who want to share a story, viewpoint, piece of advice, or inquiry with others in the postdoctoral community. Please submit your written piece, question, or idea, to uc_postdoc_newsletter@berkeley.edu or contact us with questions.
continued to be held in high regard after dean Atkinson's departure.
Patricia Calarco, professor in the department of anatomy, was hired to
replace him in 2007, and carries on that same dedication to postdocs.
Des Jarlais, assistant dean for outreach and postdoctoral affairs, has a
staff member dedicated full time as a postdoctoral affairs assistant,
Jeannine Cuevas.

The top-down, bottom-up impetus has sustained postdocs throughout the
past decade and more. During a particularly low ebb in organized
postdoc activity on the campus, Des Jarlais solicited names of enthusiastic
postdocs from departmental postdoc administrators. After inviting
them to a lunch she hosted, she was able to inspire a new crop of
postdocs to run the UC San Francisco Postdoctoral Scholars Association
(PSA).

UC San Francisco is unusual among UC campuses in that it is dedicated
to health sciences and does not have an undergraduate population. Given
this, postdocs make up a much larger percentage of the population than a
typical campus with undergraduates. Although this did not happen
automatically, postdocs are now viewed as a legitimate, unique campus
constituency. Services, such as career development, are automatically
extended beyond graduate students to postdocs, and the UC San
Francisco website now contains “Postdocs” as a button at the top of the
homepage.

As a result of this progress, Des Jarlais’ efforts can emphasize leadership
at a broader level. She is credited with single-handedly putting the word
“postdoc” into the daily vocabulary of campus staff because of her
tireless reminder that when one lists members of the campus community,
“faculty, students and staff,” “postdocs” need to be listed as well. She is
the chair of the UC-wide Council of Graduate Deans Postdoc Workgroup,
and a UC San Francisco representative on the UC bargaining team,
working with the United Auto Workers on a contract for postdocs.

Dean Calarco’s long tenure at UC San Francisco has allowed her to
witness the dedication and hard work of postdoc advocates for more than
a decade, including the creation and implementation of APM 390 (see
article, this issue, by Des Jarlais) and the postdoc health insurance plan.
As a woman who came through the system when there were very few
women, she knows that a pressing issue remains to be the attrition of
women coming through the “pipeline.” She sees that there continues to
be a perception that not working the typical work schedule (to have
children, for example) may affect colleagues’ assessments of one’s
commitment. Her own policy was that as long as her work met the
approval of her peers (in peer-review), she would make it through, despite
feelings of alienation. Her personal history informs her commitment to
the ongoing challenge of retaining women and allowing them to advance.

Calarco appreciates her transition to being heavily involved in administra-
tion. It allows her the opportunity to make a difference in aspects of
university life that have greater social connotations than her own
research interests do.

Calarco’s strong administrative leadership and institutional devotion to
the status and situation of postdocs at UC San Francisco support Des
Jarlais’ office and their own dedication. The synergy of these offices, and
the efforts of these leaders, means that great things will continue to come
out of UC San Francisco with regard to postdocs.

The CPS represents all 10 UC campuses with the aim to improve the postdoctoral
experience and the career development opportunities for postdoctoral scholars in UC. In
July of 2009, outgoing CPS Chair Fabian Filipp traveled from San Diego to the San
Francisco Bay Area to pass the torch to Amanda Stiles, postdoctoral fellow in plant and
microbial biology, and Vice President of the Berkeley Postdoctoral Association. As
Chair of the CPS, Amanda will continue to keep the UC Council of Graduate Deans (COGD)
up-to-date on the progress of the CPS and will head up other ongoing CPS activities for postdocs. One of Amanda’s
target events will be to fund and organize a local meeting of Bay Area
postdoctoral leaders from all regional institutions. This idea has support
within the CPS, but will require concerted fund-raising efforts by the
group to be successful.

At the 2009 National Postdoctoral Association (NPA) annual meeting in
Houston, Texas, more than a dozen CPS representatives shared news and events from their home campuses. UC Los Angeles’ Postdoc Toolkit
(reported in the June issue of this newsletter) received special attention
at the NPA meeting, and was referenced as a model for postdoctoral
career guidance. Also at the meeting, plenary speaker Peter Fiske
focused on the importance of professional networking. “Anyone’s career
options, be they for an academic career, or for a career in public policy,
critically depend on the professional network they develop,” he
explained. Workshops on identifying transferable skills and Individual
Development Plans (IDP) reinforced the need to keep our minds open as
we plan our careers. For more on IDPs, go to

Active members of UC postdoctoral associations are elected to represent
their campuses in the CPS and to interact with faculty administration at
their own campus. Under the CPS umbrella, common goals are identified
and systemwide activities are coordinated and communicated between
postdoctoral associations and postdoctoral offices.

With the goal of reinforcing the links between campus administration
and postdocs, the CPS hopes to combine its next meeting with the
upcoming UC COGD Postdoc Work Group meeting. A strength of the CPS

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The UC San Francisco PSA was formed in 1995 and, as such, is one of the oldest postdoc associations in the U.S. With between 1,000 and 1,100 active members, it is also one of the biggest.

The executive council of the PSA consists of 17 chairs, dedicated to different issues ranging from organizing social hours, outdoor events, lecture series and mentoring meetings, to outreach, marketing, public relations and sponsorship. The executive council also includes representatives who sit on 14 different UC San Francisco-wide committees.

The UC San Francisco PSA has been supported financially by kind donations from departments who hire the majority of postdocs. Aside from this, the PSA now also actively seeks outside sponsorships for its events and offers various platforms for advertisements of its sponsors.

In the past several years, the PSA has organized numerous social events that attracted postdocs and successfully created a space for socializing and networking. For example, the 2009 Practice of Science Lecture Series gave the PSA an opportunity to host: the founder of Green Chemistry, John C. Warner; the Nobel Laureate, George Olah; the political activist, Stanley Aronowitz; and many other speakers who were invited to inspire postdocs with stories about doing science.

Additionally, the PSA organizes dozens of coffee and social hours on campus, as well as plenty of outside events— including bowling, ski trips and chocolate tasting. Mentoring dinners are also regularly organized to give postdocs a chance to spend time with some of the UC San Francisco’s faculty and alumni in an informal setting.

The PSA strives to act in accordance with its original ideals, that is, to be a “grassroots organization seeking improvements in the training and work climate of postdocs.” To this regard, institutional history has shown that creating educational and intellectually novel settings provides essential stimuli needed to energize the PSA.

Opportunities for pragmatic networking, for casual socializing and for career development, need to be balanced with an environment in which the fundamental questions relevant to life, ethics, and science are asked in order to keep the PSA momentum. The PSA currently strives to keep optimism and a cheerful spirit among postdocs, not forgetting to address important questions about both the quality of life and the scientific creativity of postdocs.
Science communication is an incredibly diverse field with numerous possibilities for gainful employment. In November, a panel of professional writers provided UC San Diego’s postdocs with insight for how to advance their careers and transition into medical, science and technical writing.

“Medical communicators write, edit, or develop materials about medicine and health,” said Jennifer Grodberg, Ph.D., Director of Regulatory Affairs with Trius Therapeutics. “They do this by gathering, organizing, interpreting, and presenting information in a manner appropriate for the target audience. Professionals in research, management, healthcare, pharmaceutical industry, and freelance qualify as medical communicators.” She highly recommended the American Medical Writers Association (http://www.amwa.org) as a useful entry platform to get exposure as a young science writer.

Roshni Mitra Chintalapati, Ph.D., translates complex scientific language into a legal format suitable for the patent department at ISIS pharmaceuticals. “I love talking, writing and reading about science,” Chintalapati said, “but I never liked doing science. During my transition into science writing, my certificate in technical writing from the UC San Diego Extension program was a major factor in getting job interviews.”

Recently, there has been an increased demand for medical writers in the pharmaceutical industry. Robin Weaver, freelancer and corporate medical writer explains, “Today, potential risks of drugs on the market have to be communicated with greater transparency. Although jobs in writing are not known for their longevity, the multiple opportunities in a science mecca like San Diego provide reasonable stability.” Robyn Leung, M.S., Manager of the Science Writing Division at Illumina, Inc. points out, “A lot that postdoctoral scholars do in their research can serve as marketable experience for a career in writing. Voluntary and part-time assignments are a good way to step into the field.”

During the lively panel discussion, Weaver commented on the large population of women science writers due to the flexible hours that are compatible with family plans. She said, “The fact that the field is overwhelmingly female might relate to the feminine attributes like team-spirit, communication skills, and mediator roles that are helpful when you need to integrate and balance different opinions for a writing assignment. However, we are dying for men in the field!”

During a networking session, postdoctoral fellows interested in exploring a career in science communications got hands-on advice from the experts on how to break into this exciting field.

**The National Postdoctoral Appreciation Day**

As you will see below, some University of California (UC) campuses took the call to appreciate their postdocs to heart. UC San Francisco, for example, hosted an outdoor barbecue that was a great success. The event included a variety of sports including volleyball, fun games for the kids, a movie, a display of photos from the previous PDA events, and music. UC San Diego also held an event in the medical school lounge, attended by over 200 postdocs, with pizza and soda, as well as over 25 door prizes and many other giveaways. UC Berkeley hosted a wine and cheese reception at the Bancroft Hotel. It was attended by more than 175 postdocs and featured live music and several speakers.

**ANSWER (CONTINUED):** In addition to the publications in print, immigration wants to see extensive citation of these publications by others for the purpose of being classified as an “Outstanding Researcher”.

To be classified as a “Scientist of Extraordinary Ability,” immigration apparently wants an applicant to have completed his/her postdoc several years prior to the application. This is because this category is reserved for scientists who have reached the very top of their fields.

Despite this new standard, there are still possibilities for postdocs. You are still able to apply under the “National Interest” or “Exceptional Ability” green card categories. At this time, both of these green card categories are easier to qualify for than the above two categories in question.

Adam Green, Attorney at Law, Los Angeles, CA  
www.employment-familysponsoredimmigration.com

**Ask Adam nearly anything about Visas, Travel, and Related Topics**
Who’s Looking Out for Postdocs?

By Natalia M. Belfiore

January 1997, the COGD formed the UC Work Group for Postdoctoral Affairs (Work Group) to address the needs and concerns of the UC postdoc community.

Under the dedication and driving force of the first Work Group chair, associate dean Jean Fort from UC San Diego, the COGD created both a systemwide postdoc policy in the Academic Policy Manual (APM), called APM 390, and the UC Postdoctoral Scholars Benefits Plan, which were implemented in 2003 and 2005 respectively. These two new programs placed the UC system on the national forefront of finding ways to improve the treatment of postdocs.

The Work Group is made up of staff from all ten UC campuses, hard-working leaders who are in the trenches working with postdocs on a daily basis. The size of the Work Group fluctuates based on the issues at hand. For example, when APM 390 and the benefits plan were pending implementation, campus staff from human resources, academic personnel, payroll, and programming all contributed to bringing these new policies to fruition. During less hectic times, the agenda only requires that each campus send one representative. Generally, however, the Work Group meets at an annual retreat and attends monthly conference calls to share successful practices and to discuss new issues that postdocs are facing.

Issues of regular importance to the Work Group include professional development, travel grants to professional conferences, access to an ombudsman and career centers, regularized postdoc social events, annual postdoc recognition events, the UC system’s obligation and role regarding increasing diversity among postdocs, development of an exit survey, postdoc data and tracking, institutionalizing Individual Development Plans (IDP) [for more about IDPs go to http://opa.faseb.org/pdf/idp.pdf], postdoc annual reviews, and mentoring of postdocs. The Work Group also occasionally meets with the UC Council of Postdoctoral Scholars to share ideas and coordinate priorities.

Currently, the major focus of the Work Group is to serve as a resource for the UC bargaining team during contract negotiations with the United Auto Workers (UAW)—the union that currently represents UC postdocs. All UC postdocs, regardless of their source of funding, have been represented by the UAW since November 2008, after the California Public Employment Relations Board certified that the card-check method of unionizing was successful (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Card_check).

The UC bargaining team is made up of faculty, postdoc office administrators, academic personnel administrators, and labor relations experts. (Des Jarlais is the UC San Francisco campus representative on the bargaining team.) This combination provides expertise and a balanced perspective on the issues being discussed during negotiations. Bi-weekly phone conversations between the UC chief negotiators (members of the UC bargaining team) and the Work Group provide a forum for information sharing and feedback, and allow both sides to stay up-to-date about the content and process of the negotiations. These negotiations will result in a contract that governs the terms and conditions of employment for postdocs in the UC system.

Postdocs are free to contact the union directly to ask questions and provide input. For more information on the status of negotiations go to http://atyourservice.ucop.edu/employees/policies_employee_labor_relations/collective_bargaining_units/post_docs/index.html

University of California (UC) Council of Postdoctoral Scholars

Editorial

by Amanda Stiles, CPS Chair, and Fabian V. Filipp, former CPS Chair

is its academic advisory role which connects the voices of postdocs to local campus postdoctoral offices so it can be carried upward to the UC Office of the President.

One of the goals of the CPS for 2010 or 2011 is to host a UC Systemwide postdoctoral research symposium at UC Berkeley. This regional meeting will allow postdocs to interact with each other, to exchange successful building blocks for 21st century career paths, and to showcase original research.