At UC Davis, Everyone Works for Postdocs

At UC Davis, there is no postdoc office, or postdoc administrator, although postdocs are generally administered by the Office of Graduate Studies and the Graduate Council. Yet, UC Davis has offered numerous services and benefits to postdocs longer than many campuses within the UC system. In 1999, a UC Davis postdoctoral scholars association (PSA) was founded by some interested postdocs, and then-Associate Dean of Graduate Studies, Jerry Hedrick.

"Ask Adam"

**QUESTION:** I am working as a postdoc at an academic institution on an H-1B visa. Friends have told me that if I want to work in industry, for example, for Genentech, that I must be concerned about the filing of a new H-1B visa application as well as the H-1B quota. Is that correct?

**ANSWER:** Yes, there are differences between the processing of an academic H-1B and an H-1B in private industry. First, because you are working for an academic employer, you are not subject to the yearly H-1B visa quota. This would also be true if you were working for a non-profit research organization, or an affiliated non-profit, such as Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory.

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**POSTDOC UNION CONTRACT RATIFIED**

On August 12, 2010, the contract between the International Union, United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America (UAW) and the University of California (UC) went into effect. Within the UC system, the bargaining unit is referred to as the “postdoctoral scholars unit.” Within the UAW, this unit is referred to as the “Postdoctoral Researchers Organize / International Union, United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America” or PRO/UAW Local 5810.

All UC postdocs were eligible to vote on ratification of the contract between August 2 and August 10, 2010, during which time PRO/UAW representatives made concerted efforts to hold voting and proposed-contract information sessions on all campuses. Out of approximately 5,700 postdocs, just over 2,700 voted, or approximately 47%, a number that is consistent with constituent voting for union contracts nationwide. Ratification was approved by a 96% margin (2,588 for, 121 against).

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**Ask Adam Green nearly anything about Visas, Travel, and Related Topics**

**Also In This Issue:**
- Know It All?! 2
- Editor’s Column 2
- Credits, and Invitation to Submit 2
- What Employers Want 2
- Tips for Mentees 3
- Postdoc Profile 4
- UC Davis PSA 4
Know It All?!  
Editor's Column By Natalia M. Belfiore

The National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health will soon be mandating that data generated with their funding be available to others, sometimes within 12 months of being generated. Commentator Felicia LeClerc of the Chronicle of Higher Education reports little consensus among scientists as to when, or whether, they will feel comfortable doing this. Excuses range from reluctance to have to sort and clean up data sets to make them public, to fear of violating privacy rights of human subjects, to fear of being scooped. But the truth is, claims LeClerc, data sharing is good science. Most fears are unfounded, and the primary generator will always have an advantage working with the data. More importantly, says LeClerc, “[t]he value of science lies in the ability to exchange and test alternative solutions.” While it may seem to be easier for tenured, senior faculty, there are, in fact, many potential benefits to junior researchers, including improved access to data for secondary analysis, thereby somewhat leveling the field.

Women may be over-mentored and under-sponsored, say authors Herminia Ibarra, Nancy Carter, and Christine Silva of the Harvard Business Review (September, 2010). “Sponsorship,” the authors state, is a form of mentoring, one that men receive considerably more often, and automatically, than do women. Sponsorship involves a senior, well-positioned person advocating for a mentee, making sure that person is visible and considered for promotion. This does not absolve the mentee from doing his or her part to be productive. But when a sponsor is involved, the person being sponsored will see career advancement.

“The drug of flattery can lead us to say yes to something that we have neither the time nor the resources to do,” says Rachel Toor of the Chronicle of Higher Education (August 31, 2010). “Sponsorship,” the authors state, is a form of mentoring, one that men receive considerably more often, and automatically, than do women. Sponsorship involves a senior, well-positioned person advocating for a mentee, making sure that person is visible and considered for promotion. This does not absolve the mentee from doing his or her part to be productive. But when a sponsor is involved, the person being sponsored will see career advancement.

Beryl Lief Benderly, of Science Careers magazine has been following the efforts of UC and PROUAW to agree to a contract, highlighting the vote by UC postdocs of 2588 to 121 for ratification. She provides an insightful viewpoint with the best of intentions. She believes “it’s heartening that the contract earnestly seeks to prevent the kind of egregious abuses that postdocs around the country often confide to Science Careers.” She also reminds readers that agreements “do not enforce themselves,” and that continued efforts will be in order.

National Postdoc Appreciation Week (September 20-24, 2010), spearheaded by the National Postdoctoral Association, is in its second year. This year, the NPA has made available a toolkit to help campuses plan events.

What Do Science or Engineering Employers Want?

By Sheldon M. Schuster, President, Keck Graduate Institute of Applied Life Sciences, Claremont Colleges Consortium

You already have a Ph.D. in science or engineering, but what you are now facing is the big question: What skills do you need to enter the corporate workforce? This is the most common uncertainty revealed in a recent survey of over 500 postdocs employed in leading institutions around the country. The Ph.D. is a superb degree and it requires discipline, intelligence, creativity and persistence. Why isn’t your Ph.D. sufficient, especially to work for companies where science is the fundamental currency of the business?

The answers are complex and require a detailed understanding of how the corporate world operates, and how it is fundamentally different from the academy. In order to facilitate discussion on this point, the Keck Graduate Institute (KGI) has arranged for Judy Heyboer to visit as a guest speaker on the Berkeley campus on November 17th. Ms. Heyboer is a human resource
specialist and former senior vice president from Genentech. Her presentation is entitled: Developing a Career in Industry: Choices for Early Career Scientists. This event is being co-sponsored by the University of California, Berkeley and KGI. Postdocs from the Northern California UC campuses are invited to attend. The lecture is scheduled for Wednesday, November 17, at 6pm in the Berdahl Auditorium of Stanley Hall. A reception will follow the lecture.

I can’t pretend to display the expertise and insight Judy brings, but I would like to describe a few of the qualities leaders in the bioscience industry mention when they ask what traits they would like to see in new employees, especially those with Ph.D.’s. The first, and really universal requirement, is the ability to work in a team. It is essential that you be able to demonstrate the capability, and hopefully the experience, of working successfully on a team that had shared goals, an aggressive timeline, was required to involve a number of different organizational functions, and was composed of individuals with a variety of skills, abilities and backgrounds. Responsibility, accountability and willingness to agree on concrete deliverables are the traits most important in the teams of corporations.

The second requirement is a deep appreciation and knowledge of the “business” in which the particular corporation operates. It is not sufficient to have superficial knowledge of the business, the finances, the market, the regulatory issues and the intellectual property situation faced by the corporation. You must have insight into the business model of the company to the same depth as your understanding of the science behind the business. After all, the company will not succeed if the business part does not succeed, regardless of the science and the excitement it generates. And everyone on the corporate team must be pulling in the same direction with the same concepts and grasp of financial reality.

Finally, as in any human endeavor, it is about the people and personal trust. Therefore, it is crucial that the people in the industry know you – not from the literature and not just from your resume. Hiring in industry is no different from hiring in any other realm – it is all about the network! You need to build relationships over time with leaders in the industry. They want to hire with confidence, and hire someone they know and trust.

These challenges require a great deal of career planning. KGI, located in Claremont, in Southern California, has established a new program specifically for Ph.D.s in the life sciences and engineering who want to take an academic path to building the skills and relations required to be competitive in the industrial world.

Listed are some suggestions for how mentees can best take advantage of the mentoring opportunities they are offered:

- Make time to meet regularly with your mentor(s). Being mentored is an important long-term investment. Be prepared for your meetings and have specific goals and tasks in mind.

- Learn to ask for help or feedback. It is through constructive and empathetic dialogues that relationships can develop, allowing both parties to bring forward their ideas, enter discussions, and ensure professional development.

- Be willing to listen and learn. Mutual trust is dependent upon maintaining confidences. Although difficult, the mentee has to be willing to openly accept criticism and feedback, demonstrating strength and the willingness to grow.

- Take advantage of opportunities presented. Part of your professional development should include seminars, speakers, classroom observations, etc. Your mentor may provide guidance on which activities would be most beneficial.

- Be open and honest. This is vital in getting the guidance and assistance you may need, and will offer your mentor the assurance that he or she also can rely on you.

- Build a relationship based on mutual respect. Being proactive is much more than just taking the initiative – it’s about accepting responsibility for your own behavior and building partnerships based on principles. Being a proactive protégé includes remembering to respect your mentor’s time and make the most of it.

- Be a problem solver. When bringing problems to your mentor, you should have possible solutions in mind to foster the development of your own problem-solving skills.

- Postdocs need to be active partners in their mentoring relationships - accepting advice and criticism but also knowing when to reject some advice. While not all of the advice given by a mentor should be followed blindly, postdocs should genuinely consider the guidance that is given. If you choose not to follow advice given, be prepared to explain why. Clarifying expectations of both mentees and mentors will ensure that mentees get the help they need and achieve their mentoring goals.

Tips for Mentees - Being Proactive in the Mentoring Process

By Melissa Muller, Associate Editor of the NPA POSTDOCKet newsletter

The ability to either proactively seek out new, or maintain relationships with established, mentors who truly provide valuable guidance can be vital in determining a postdoc’s career path. Being proactive with established mentors can be as simple as monthly check-in calls, meetings, or e-mails to stay in touch. For seeking out new mentors, it can involve asking for a mentor to be assigned by Human Resources or searching for a secondary mentor and other opportunities which will allow the growth and development of your own professional network.
No matter what kind of a mentor you have – one who offers little or no help, one who constantly overwhelms you with information, or even a mentor who is an experienced teacher and understands how to work effectively with a postdoc – you will get more out of mentoring if you are proactive in the process.

Additional mentoring information may be found at: http://www.nationalpostdoc.org/publications/mentoring-plans

**POSTDOC PROFILES**

**Featuring Postdocs at Work**

The UC Postdoc Newsletter features postdoctoral research from the postdoc’s perspective in each issue. You will see—through the eyes of the postdoc—how the University of California affects the lives of these young researchers. In this chapter of Postdoc Profiles, one UC San Francisco postdoc in neurology, and one UC Davis postdoc in computer science are highlighted. Both of these scientists, in very different fields, have decided to pursue professional training to improve their teaching skills, in conjunction with their postdoctoral research. They have contributed descriptions of their time as postdoctoral scholars and teaching fellows.

Dorothy Jones-Davis has a Ph.D. in Neuroscience from the University of Michigan. She currently works in the Neurology Department at UC San Francisco as a postdoc, and an ISIS Fellow. Her research pursues her interest in the causes of epilepsy. In her third year, she became an ISIS Fellow which allows her to also pursue her interest in teaching, and to reflect on the role of mentors in postdoctoral training. Click here to view Jones-Davis’s profile.

René Rosenbaum has a Ph.D. in Computer Science from the University of Rostock, Germany, where he also completed his MS. He specializes in developing sophisticated methods for viewing and displaying large data sets of all kinds. In his second year as a Computer Science postdoc in the Institute for Data Analysis and Visualization laboratory at UC Davis, he has begun the UC Davis training program, Professors for the Future, where he participates in many different kinds of training for a teaching career. Click here to view Rosenbaum’s profile.

“The Postdoc Profiles” is a new element of the UC Postdoc Newsletter. Each issue will feature stories about or by individual postdocs, highlighting their subfield and experience. Write in your ideas to vspa@berkeley.edu. We look forward to hearing from postdocs throughout the UC system.

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**Postdoctoral Scholar Association at UC Davis Maintains Legacy**

The UC Davis Postdoctoral Scholar Association (PSA) is one of the earliest to be formed in the UC system. Founded by two postdocs, Teresa Dillinger and Sarah Partan, in 1999, in collaboration with then-Associate Dean of Graduate Studies, Dr. Jerry Hedrick, the UC Davis PSA has been at the forefront of making change for UC postdocs ever since. Currently, it is co-chaired by Eliza Bliss-Moreau, postdoc in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, and Anke Schennink, postdoc in the Department of Animal Science.

In the last academic year, the PSA spearheaded several initiatives, and organized many events, including Postdoc Recognition Day (May 2010), which began with two speakers on “Innovative Approaches to Marketing Your Research,” followed by a reception with announcement of the winners of the Excellence in Postdoctoral Research Award 2010. With funds made available annually through the Office of Graduate Studies, the PSA also granted about 12 Postdoc Travel Awards (three rounds per year). In addition, members led a workshop at the Pathway Career Fair on “Life as a Postdoc.” A new initiative has put the establishment of a Postdoc Mentoring Award on the agenda of the Graduate Council.

In 2009, the PSA also completed the UC Davis Postdoctoral Scholars Handbook which is full of policy information, advice, and guidance for postdocs. The current edition was produced by the Office of Graduate Studies, and is currently under revision in consideration of the new PRO-UAW contract with UC. Given the differences in administration and execution of many aspects of postdoc life on each UC campus, it makes sense for each campus to have its own guidance document. Nonetheless, this well-structured document serves as a template for other campuses to produce similar handbooks.

The PSA officer structure and meeting frequency has varied over the years, depending on the level of participation by postdocs, as with any volunteer group. Co-organizers are seeking to increase participation by UC Davis postdocs and are aware of the difficulty of having a split campus, with many postdocs at the Health Center campus in Sacramento. As a first step in trying to understand falling meeting and event attendance, the PSA held a Postdoc Interests Survey in the Fall of 2009. This prompted them to organize several Postdoc Happy Hours, a Fall Barbeque, and to initiate a UC Davis Postdoc Facebook page.
In the coming weeks and months, PSA officers will need help with updating the Postdoctoral Scholars Handbook, updating the PSA web page content, organizing events, such as the travel award series, the (pending) new Postdoc Mentoring Award, and other activities. Officers welcome all UC Davis postdocs to join in any event, to network, find mutual support, or to get involved in any PSA activities.

Dr. Hedrick promoted interest in postdocs around campus, and took on the task of ensuring some key services began to be made available to postdocs. By 2001, a representative from the UC Davis PSA was invited to sit on the UC Davis Graduate Council, and thereby was able to make more needs and concerns known to the Office of Graduate Studies.

Remarkably, two years before the adoption of Academic Policy Manual (APM) 390 (the UC policy that governs postdoctoral appointments), UC Davis adopted its own campus policy governing postdocs that instituted many of the same policies brought in with APM 390. These policies were developed by the PSA in conjunction with the Graduate Council at Davis, and many of these were instituted in APM 390. Dean Jeffery Gibeling (then Associate Dean) was part of the UC-wide committee that developed APM 390.

Thus, over time, efforts by Dr. Hedrick, and later Dr. Gibeling, fueled by active participation by UC Davis postdocs, ensured postdocs were integrated into resources and activities originally made available to graduate students. During this early period, career center services, already available to postdocs, were expanded to ensure workshops, events, and other services better fit the needs of postdocs. In addition, postdocs were invited to join a unique a program to train and mentor future academic faculty called “Professors for the Future.” Dr. Gibeling has overseen the creation of a professional development program for postdocs, as well as an award for Excellence in Postdoctoral Research. He plans to institute a mentoring award for excellent faculty mentors of postdocs, an award that already exists for graduate student mentors.

One of the postdocs in the original postdoctoral scholars association was Dr. Teresa Dillinger, who currently holds a joint appointment as the Coordinator of the Graduate Student and Postdoctoral Career and Professional Development Services, and of the UC Davis Internship & Career Center. Having been a postdoc herself, Dr. Dillinger is able to help institute and design a wide variety of programs for postdocs that really provide what they need. These include a biweekly new-postdoc orientation, an annual day-long Pathways Career Symposium, and a Professional Development Series of workshops for all aspects of career development.

In addition to these individuals and offices, postdocs utilize the office of external fellowships for assistance with applications, and for workshops. Postdoc appointments are handled by Tracey Pereida in Graduate Studies. Postdoc health insurance plans are handled by someone in human resources. And so on.

While decentralized, this system appears to work well for UC Davis postdocs. Nearly every service available to staff or graduate students is available, and often tailored, for postdocs. When asked if there are drawbacks to this approach, both Dr. Gibeling and Dr. Dillinger admitted that having a postdoc office and a central administrator in charge seemed to be the gold standard, and they could imagine some benefits from this. But as it is, there seems to be little lacking in UC Davis services for postdocs.

ANSWER(CONTINUED): By contrast, if you seek to be employed by an employer subject to the H-1B quota, please know that the yearly H-1B visa quota for those with masters or doctorates from U.S. universities is 85,000. If the masters or doctorate is from a foreign university the yearly quota is 65,000.

You must be aware that if you go from an H-1B quota-exempt employer, such as the University of California, to a private employer, such as Genentech, all of a sudden you are affected by the H-1B quota. If you transfer your H-1B from a private industry employer to another private employer, you do not have to be concerned with the quota as you have already received an H-1B within the quota limits. If you move from a “cap subject” employer (e.g., Genentech) to a “cap exempt” employer (e.g., UC) again, you do not have to worry about the quota as academic institutions are exempt from it.

In addition, the filing fees for H-1B quota-exempt employers are lower than for a private industry employer.

There is no difference in the processing time between the quota-exempt and quota-subject employers.

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

PRO/UAW representatives and campus postdoc representatives will hold meetings on each campus on an ongoing basis to encourage membership, to explain the contract, and answer questions, as well as to take feedback about how the contract is being implemented. All UC postdocs are eligible to become PRO/UAW members, and thus eligible to vote on future aspects of contract negotiations, and to vote for representatives.
Many aspects of postdoctoral work agreements have been defined in the contract, with the goals of standardizing work conditions, entitlements, and compensation among postdocs across the UC. For example, compensation minima have been raised nearly uniformly to be in accord with the NIH Notice pertaining to the Ruth L. Kirschstein National Research Service Award (NRSA) Stipend Levels. It should be noted that nothing prevents the University, or an external funder, from providing a higher level of compensation. The only exception to the compensation minimum pertains to postdocs who are on an external fellowship whose compensation is below the NRSA levels and whose fellowship explicitly limits the total income to the amount awarded by the fellowship; these cases are very rare.

Postdocs are encouraged to read the contract and attend informational meetings so that they understand what the terms of the contract are. These including, for example, reference to paid time off, paid travel to conferences deemed mandatory by your supervisor, and a formal performance review system. Last month, the UC Office of Labor Relations held sessions to train administrators on the terms and conditions of the contract.

In addition to immediate pay increases for all postdocs which went into effect this autumn, postdocs will receive guaranteed increases after each year worked as a postdoc. The specifics of the increases and timing vary considerably and are laid out in the contract. Furthermore, postdocs now incur a fee for representation by the PRO/UAW. Postdocs who elect to become union members before April of 2011 will pay 1.15% of their gross income in dues (after April of 2011, postdocs will also be charged a one-time fee of $10 to initiate membership). Postdocs who decline to be a member will pay an “agency fee” (also called a “fair share fee”) of 0.85% of their gross income to the union. As an example, a postdoc who makes $37,000 per year, will pay $425.50 per year. Postdocs with the same salary who elect not to become members will pay $314.50 per year. UC receives a tiny portion of these fees as a cost of administering the payments through the payroll system.

This contract will remain in effect through midnight on September 30, 2015, unless the UAW and UC agree in writing to extend any of the provisions. The process of proposing new contract conditions and negotiating a new contract to go into effect after September 30, 2015, is laid out in the current contract in detail.

The final contract is available on the UC Office of the President website, and on the PRO-UAW website.

To discuss terms and conditions of a postdoctoral appointment, postdocs can contact:

The PRO/UAW office at (510) 549-3863, or
The UC Contact, Steve Montiel at (510) 987-9157.

To discuss other matters related to a postdoctoral appointment, you should contact your campus postdoc office.