UC Berkeley has one of the largest populations of postdocs in the UC system, and the largest contingent of postdocs in the humanities and social sciences of any UC campus. With both a highly functional postdoc office with a dedicated staff person, and an active postdoctoral association (see tandem article in this issue), it is, arguably, one of the most institutionally supportive UC campuses for postdocs.

Postdocs at UC Berkeley fall under the purview of the Vice Chancellor for Research, being the first UC campus to break the mold of placing postdocs under the Dean of Graduate Studies. This arrangement, many feel, is appropriate given the research nature of postdoctoral work. UC Berkeley’s current Vice Chancellor for Research, Dr. Graham Fleming, has had many postdocs during his career, and recognizes that his job is not to create replicates of himself, but to support postdocs in determining their own best career trajectory, and to flourish on the way, thus his support for developing broad postdoc training opportunities on campus. In addition, one of many strengths at UC Berkeley, according to Fleming, is the availability of internal, and interdisciplinary fellowships for postdocs. Programs such as the Miller Institute for Basic Research encourage postdocs to collaborate across fields, and support interdisciplinary stimulation. This kind of work is increasingly important in today’s research world, and this training will serve these postdocs well.

Beyond policy, the day-to-day administration of postdoc matters is carried out by the Visiting Scholar and Postdoctoral Affairs (VSPA) Program, led by Sam Castañeda since 1995. The VSPA Program is one of the oldest postdoc offices (PDoS) in the country. It is Castañeda’s capable and creative spirit that keeps postdoc matters on the minds of UC Berkeley faculty and staff administrators as well as campus service providers.
Know It All?! 
Editor's Column By Natalia M. Belfiore

According to Arizona State University's CareerWise, many younger members of our academic community are part of the “Me” generation. As the name implies, “Me” generationers operate through a much more self-centered agenda than older, baby boomers. This strategy may work well in some settings, but authors contend that some instinctual “Me” behavior may need to be curbed to be more successful working with older, idealistic troops of the boomer generation.

Is a market-based approach to supporting research through government funding appropriate? This is a question that Mark Bauerlein reviews in the Chronicle of Higher Education (May 21, 2011). Bauerlein cites several more in-depth pieces that propose or rebut the notion that in a restricted funding environment, research dollars should be targeted at specific fields that are underpopulated. The notion is that as an economy, funders have a responsibility to think broadly and provide a market service—help to produce experts in fields where there aren’t enough. The contrary view is that funding agencies should not be involved in this kind of market-based value system, but rather, should fund good work, first and foremost.

If non-partisan agencies and foundations should be free to fund the best research, regardless of its market-filling potential, who should be allowed to weigh in on what’s important and what isn’t? A senator from Oklahoma, Tom Coburn, has been vocal about his opposition to what he considers wasteful research spending by the National Science Foundation (NSF), according to Wall Street Journal writer Louise Radnolsky (May 27, 2011). Snipping fragments of the research study descriptions, Coburn makes NSF’s choices sound frivolous. On other matters, he does not seem to understand that paying the travel costs of review panelists is the only way to get all the free labor that is the basis of NSF grant review procedures.

Entrepreneurial pursuits are one way to get around the values debate surrounding government funding. David G. Jensen writes, in Science Careers (May 20, 2011), about his efforts to help scientists understand what is necessary to bring a good idea to market. He summarizes the four under-appreciated concepts critical to being a successful science entrepreneur, namely, propose to fill an unmet need, be flexible, seek and listen to advice, and don’t expect to get rich quick. And he points to one program designed to match scientists with ideas, with business professionals. His final take home advice: “Ask yourself: So what? And who cares?”

This column is a regular feature of the UC Postdoc Newsletter and provides 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 vspa@berkeley.edu or contact us with questions.

Natalia M. Belfiore, Ph.D. Editor-in-Chief; UC Berkeley, Visiting Scholar
Sam Castañeda, Managing Editor, UC Berkeley, Director, Visiting Scholar and Postdoc Affairs Program
Michael A. Fisher, Ph.D. President, Berkeley Postdoctoral Association; Postdoctoral Scholar, Energy Biosciences Institute
Adam Green, Law Offices of Adam Green
Corinne Hausmann, Ph.D. Former President, Berkeley Postdoctoral Association; Specialist Senior at Deloitte Consulting
Angela Mariano, Ph.D. Chancellor’s Research Fellow, UC Berkeley
Mario Marquez Miranda, Ph.D. División de Estudios de Posgrado, Universidad Tecnológica de la Mixteca
Kennan Salinero, Ph.D. Executive Director and President, Yámana Science and Technology
Mahadeo A. Sukhai, Ph.D. CIHR and Ontario Ministry of Research & Innovation Post-Doctoral Fellow, Princess Margaret Hospital/Ontario Cancer Institute
Casey Wight, Designer and Layout Editor

BEYOND DIALOGUE: HOW OPEN COMMUNICATION CAN PRODUCE OUR BEST WORK

By Kennan Salinero, Ph.D., Executive Director and President, Yámana Science and Technology

There is a wonderful book with a title that few scientists are likely to stumble across: Power, the Infinite Game, by Michael Broom. In this and his follow up book, The Infinite Organization, Broom gives concrete examples of how organizations, and the individuals within them, can move past ordinary win/lose competition and shows how workplace dynamics can be crafted to form win/win outcomes.

This column is a regular feature of the UC Postdoc Newsletter and provides 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 vspa@berkeley.edu or contact us with questions.

Natalia M. Belfiore, Ph.D. Editor-in-Chief; UC Berkeley, Visiting Scholar
Sam Castañeda, Managing Editor, UC Berkeley, Director, Visiting Scholar and Postdoc Affairs Program
Michael A. Fisher, Ph.D. President, Berkeley Postdoctoral Association; Postdoctoral Scholar, Energy Biosciences Institute
Adam Green, Law Offices of Adam Green
Corinne Hausmann, Ph.D. Former President, Berkeley Postdoctoral Association; Specialist Senior at Deloitte Consulting
Angela Mariano, Ph.D. Chancellor’s Research Fellow, UC Berkeley
Mario Marquez Miranda, Ph.D. División de Estudios de Posgrado, Universidad Tecnológica de la Mixteca
Kennan Salinero, Ph.D. Executive Director and President, Yámana Science and Technology
Mahadeo A. Sukhai, Ph.D. CIHR and Ontario Ministry of Research & Innovation Post-Doctoral Fellow, Princess Margaret Hospital/Ontario Cancer Institute
Casey Wight, Designer and Layout Editor

BEYOND DIALOGUE: HOW OPEN COMMUNICATION CAN PRODUCE OUR BEST WORK

By Kennan Salinero, Ph.D., Executive Director and President, Yámana Science and Technology

There is a wonderful book with a title that few scientists are likely to stumble across: Power, the Infinite Game, by Michael Broom. In this and his follow up book, The Infinite Organization, Broom gives concrete examples of how organizations, and the individuals within them, can move past ordinary win/lose competition and shows how workplace dynamics can be crafted to form win/win outcomes.

This column is a regular feature of the UC Postdoc Newsletter and provides 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 vspa@berkeley.edu or contact us with questions.

Natalia M. Belfiore, Ph.D. Editor-in-Chief; UC Berkeley, Visiting Scholar
Sam Castañeda, Managing Editor, UC Berkeley, Director, Visiting Scholar and Postdoc Affairs Program
Michael A. Fisher, Ph.D. President, Berkeley Postdoctoral Association; Postdoctoral Scholar, Energy Biosciences Institute
Adam Green, Law Offices of Adam Green
Corinne Hausmann, Ph.D. Former President, Berkeley Postdoctoral Association; Specialist Senior at Deloitte Consulting
Angela Mariano, Ph.D. Chancellor’s Research Fellow, UC Berkeley
Mario Marquez Miranda, Ph.D. División de Estudios de Posgrado, Universidad Tecnológica de la Mixteca
Kennan Salinero, Ph.D. Executive Director and President, Yámana Science and Technology
Mahadeo A. Sukhai, Ph.D. CIHR and Ontario Ministry of Research & Innovation Post-Doctoral Fellow, Princess Margaret Hospital/Ontario Cancer Institute
Casey Wight, Designer and Layout Editor

BEYOND DIALOGUE: HOW OPEN COMMUNICATION CAN PRODUCE OUR BEST WORK

By Kennan Salinero, Ph.D., Executive Director and President, Yámana Science and Technology

There is a wonderful book with a title that few scientists are likely to stumble across: Power, the Infinite Game, by Michael Broom. In this and his follow up book, The Infinite Organization, Broom gives concrete examples of how organizations, and the individuals within them, can move past ordinary win/lose competition and shows how workplace dynamics can be crafted to form win/win outcomes.

This column is a regular feature of the UC Postdoc Newsletter and provides 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 vspa@berkeley.edu or contact us with questions.
The University of California Institute for Mexico and the United States (UC MEXUS) has served to bring Mexican researchers to the University of California (UC), as well as send UC researchers to Mexico, and build collaborations for over thirty years. Through cost-sharing programs to faculty and visiting scholars, graduate students, and postdocs, it has brought Mexico-focused research to light within UC, and helped to create research networks invaluable on both sides of the border.

UC MEXUS has had an agreement in recent years with Mexico’s National Council for Science and Technology (Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología or CONACYT) to support joint research of American postdocs in Mexico, or of Mexican postdocs at UC. Fellowships and grants from both institutions are combined to support research by postdocs funded under this program. Postdocs at UC may also benefit if their UC faculty advisor or a Mexican visiting scholar at UC receives a UC MEXUS small grant or collaborative research grant which helps to support their research project.

This program funds approximately 18 postdoc fellowships per year, and since 2002, has funded 125 postdocs. The program currently permits applications for a second year of fellowship funding, a recently reinstated feature that greatly enhances the postdoc’s ability to complete a project within the fellowship duration. Although fellowships are available both for postdocs to travel from Mexico to work at a UC, and for American postdocs to travel to Mexico and work with a host institution there, more applications are received from Mexican postdocs applying to work at a UC. This may be explained by the relative lack of postdoctoral funding available to Mexican researchers.

The program funds 55% biological, health and medical science postdocs, and another 34% in hard and computer sciences; the balance includes humanities, social science and law scholars. These proportions roughly reflect postdocs in these fields in the U.S. The review panels are earnest in their quest to fund postdocs who stand to make the most of their international mentoring and skill-building opportunities, in either direction, and this is a main driver in determining who receives funding.

The overall goal of the program is to fund projects that will be successful, and lead to future collaborations of various kinds across the border. Program director, Dr. Wendy DeBoer has been impressed by some of the remarkable enthusiasm shown by host researchers from UC and Mexico, and the creativity shown in developing ongoing networks of research and training. In addition, one of the goals for Mexican postdocs coming to UC is that the postdoc have access to equipment or skills which are unavailable or scarce in his or her home environment. Postdocs given this opportunity often return home to set up laboratories with these new tools and skills in Mexico. Dr. DeBoer strives to determine the success of the program by following up with surveys of funded postdocs and welcomes feedback of all kinds.

UC campuses who have submitted the most applications and thus received the most funding under these programs are UC San Diego and UC Riverside, with other campuses trailing far behind. UC MEXUS welcomes inquiries and applications from all fields and all campuses. Deadlines for postdoc fellowships are generally in March of each year. Deadlines for postdoc small grants are twice a year. The UC MEXUS website has complete information.

[Note that this issue of the UC Postdoc Newsletter features a Postdoc Profile by a UC MEXUS-CONACYT-funded postdoc.]

---

THE BERKELEY POSTDOCTORAL ASSOCIATION CONTINUES TO ADVOCATE

By Corinne Hausmann and Michael A. Fisher

As the second oldest postdoctoral association in the United States, the UC Berkeley Postdoctoral Association (BPA) has grown steadily since its inception in 1998. The BPA is a volunteer organization comprised of postdocs actively involved in the professional development and social networking of its more than 1,400 postdoc members. At Berkeley, all postdocs are de facto members of this unique forum, designed to network, exchange ideas, and learn the culture of the University of California and the Bay Area.

Berkeley postdocs at 2011 Spring social

From modest beginnings, the BPA has gained momentum in popularity, campus connections, community affiliations, and funding. Indeed, the BPA has developed and matured largely due to our close working relationship with the Visiting Scholar and Postdoc Affairs (VSPA) Office, increased funding from the VSPA, the Vice Chancellor for Research, and other sources, as well as strong marketing efforts to promote our mission throughout the UC and off-campus communities. Over the years, BPA social and professional development events have expanded to include an annual Faculty Award for Excellence in Postdoctoral Mentoring, National Postdoc Appreciation Day celebrations, monthly BPA-and corporate-sponsored happy hours, food drives, raffle-prize donations from local businesses, and quarterly barbecues and holiday parties, all of which are advertised on the BPA Facebook page open to viewing by the public.

In collaboration with the VSPA Program, the BPA has also established a continually-growing seminar series on topics directly relevant to postdocs, such as job interviewing skills, resume writing, non-academic career paths, and grants writing. Additionally, the BPA website offers resources on UC Berkeley, funding opportunities, educational information on academic and industry jobs, and policies that apply directly to postdoctoral scholars. Critical information such as

Continued on Page 7 »
The National Science Foundation (NSF) is the second major government funding agency of basic research, funding 20% of government funded research in the U.S. With less than 25% of the budget of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), and a broader purview, it does not support its own research campus, and thus does not have staff postdocs or, by extension, intramural postdoctoral support.

However, through its extensive postdoctoral fellowship program, it provides grants to individual postdoc applicants in most or all of its directorates. This means, fellows are funded in most of the scientific fields supported by one of the seven NSF Directorates ranging from Biology to Geosciences to Cyberinfrastructure. In addition, funding is available, designated for postdoc fellowship support, in a number of other areas that cut across the NSF Directorates. These include, for example, an Arctic Research fellowship, a fellowship for New International Collaborations, and fellowships for research that supports the Intelligence Community. The specific areas funded are established for a few years, and then the areas are revisited and may be revised at future times.

Each program is able to support a few to over three dozen postdocs, with approximately 150 postdoctoral fellows funded at any given time. In addition to individual postdoc fellowships, the NSF funds over 10,000 grants at any time, which include support for over 6500 postdocs funded through research grants awarded to principle investigators throughout the U.S.

In addition to providing support for salaries and research costs, the NSF seeks to support and improve the postdoc experience in multiple ways. Fellowships provide funding for a variety of postdoc mentoring and educational steps in addition to employment benefits and the research component, so the fellowship programs can be quite specific in their requirements for postdoc support.

Beyond fellowships, in the past decade, the NSF grant proposal guide for regular (non-fellowship) grants has added a requirement that submitters describe their plan for postdoc mentoring. The guide includes guidelines for developing a mentoring plan, as well as an example. It specifies that all postdocs funded on the same grant should be under the same mentoring plan. Finally, it stipulates that the mentoring plan will be evaluated in the “broader impacts” section of the grant review process.

According to Dr. Jim Lightbourne, Director of the Division of Graduate Education and Acting Director of Division of Human Resource Development, with these and other evolving requirements for funding of all sorts that affect postdocs, the NSF hopes to influence and inspire more campuses to provide mentoring services and resources for postdocs.

**QUESTION:**

In the last issue of the UC Postdoc Newsletter, an international postdoc asked for advice as to how her British fiancé could come to the U.S. to join her and work as a computer programmer. In your answer, you provided several options for the fiancé to join the postdoc and be able to work in his field. Although your options were easy to understand, I am miffed with your answer as it relates to the H-1b visa options for postdocs. Here’s what you said:

“The H-1b visa does not require that the job be full-time and normally the approval notice can be secured in a matter of weeks from immigration.”

How can this be? At all UC campuses, all postdocs on H-1b visas are required to work full-time. Further, you stated “the approval notice could be secured in a matter of weeks.” Are you kidding? I thought that everyone had to wait months as this seems to be my experience as a postdoc.

Could you please illuminate me on this matter? I am very upset that I am being forced to work full time as a postdoc on an H-1b visa.

**ANSWER:**

Each U.S. employer, private or public, such as the University of California (UC), can have its own personnel rules regarding whether or not they will sponsor someone for the H-1b work visa. In that regard, UC will sponsor postdocs for the H-1b visa only if they will be full-time. This is the UC postdoc policy and it is “written in stone” systemwide. So, this is not a CIS (U.S. Citizen and Immigration Services, formerly the INS or Immigration and Naturalization Services) regulatory policy.

However, if you were to work in private industry, or for a different academic employer, there is nothing in the regulations that prevents the employer from sponsoring a part-time employee for an H-1b visa. In fact, I frequently have approved the H-1b visa for part-time visiting, or adjunct faculty at colleges and universities in the U.S. I have the same result for private industry employees that can only find part time work.

It is absolutely normal to have the H-1b application approved within a matter of two to three weeks if an additional $1,225 is paid to immigration. This extra amount is called the “premium processing fee” and brings your application to the front of the line. However, it does not make it any more certain that the application will be approved. The additional filing fee of $1,225 merely guarantees that you will have an answer, hopefully positive, within three weeks of the filing.
Beyond Dialogue: How Open Communication Can Produce Our Best Work

In a mentoring relationship in which I hold the role of coach, an outgrowth of a pilot program that Yamana Science and Technology began last year at the 2010 National Postdoc Association conference, I have experienced win/win. To start, Susan Morris and others distinguish a mentor from a coach such that:

A mentor is a more experienced senior who offers to take a junior “under his/her wing” while, a coach, as an equal partner with the coachee, supports the achievement of extraordinary results, based on goals set by the coachee.

At one point, I suggested that my coachee meet with her immediate departmental supervisor in an informal setting to establish more relatedness, as they were starting to experience some tension while he worked closely with someone senior to both of them. In response, she quoted Kathy Barker’s At the Heim which advises against getting too ‘chummy’ with lab advisees. Why did I disagree with Kathy Barker’s advice? Where should professional boundaries be drawn, and to what purpose?

My coachee and I learned a good bit from exploring these questions, as it caused me to look more deeply into my own beliefs. I carry a strong belief that workplaces with a high level of trust, shared empathy, and what I call ‘approachability’ have increased productivity. This is based on personal experience, but corroborates advice from the field of organizational development, and authors such as Charles Feelman, with his work on trust in highly technical workplaces and Peter Senge, who wrote The Fifth Discipline. This is distinct from being ‘chums’, where accountability can be lacking. This is only one example of many in which my coachee and I shared resources from which we both benefited.

I believe that lowering boundaries helps to create a shared vision. This is what I advised my coachee to do with her immediate supervisor, but also what my coachee and I did to engage in this (and other) discussions. This approach is a growing trend.

I recently heard Sir Roland Jackson advocate ‘communication beyond dialogue’ between the public and scientists. Really? What kinds of communication go ‘beyond dialogue’?

One answer lies in a recent white paper produced by the Demos Foundation out of Great Britain, which suggests the public be involved much further upstream in scientific advances to avoid the type of breakdown that has occurred around production and consumption of genetically modified organisms. ‘Beyond dialogue’, thus, refers to not only speaking and listening to the public regarding scientific advances, but having the dialogue occur during the earliest stages of research development to allow input to actually affect the direction of research.

I argue that communicating beyond dialogue in the realm of science and public opinion is analogous to ‘approachability’ in the realm of the technical workplace. ‘Approachability’ is attained through lowering barriers to full communication early-on, in a way that creates shared decision-making.
processes and leadership. In both contexts, this transparency and openness creates trust, which is becoming of key interest to a scientific community that has, for example, seen genetically modified organism (GMO) research become severely restricted after years of highly focused research.

In keeping with my assertion that groups working on the basis of approachability, openness and trust lead to higher productivity, I end with mentioning the works of John Hagel and John Seely Brown *The Power of Pull* and *The Only Sustainable Edge*. They find that extreme performers share one common attribute: deep passion. Individuals from the group they are most interested in, ‘passionate explorers’ create large webs of connectedness, open communication, and feedback. They tend to discuss their challenges (not their accomplishments) early on in conversations with colleagues. This leads to development of trust, early on, as their openness is disarming. What follows is the ability to share tacit (not written) knowledge with great speed. Accelerated knowledge gain, and extreme performance gains, result from this open, shared, non-hierarchical environment in which both parties win.

As you progress in your career and your interactions with colleagues, I suggest that extreme competitiveness and a ‘one-ranger’ approach to work will offer up diminishing returns in the workplace of the future. Self-assessment and self-development are necessary components for tapping into one’s ability to belong to a group that operates at peak performance.

---

**2011 National Postdoctoral Association Meeting Highlights**

Two years in the making, the NPA Core Competencies were designed to provide guidance for postdoctoral researchers seeking professional development opportunities and the institutions providing these opportunities. Panelists included: Nancy Schwartz, Ph.D., Dean for Graduate and Postdoctoral Affairs, University of Chicago, Keith Nicoli, Ph.D., Postdoctoral Program Manager, NYU School of Medicine, Sackler Institute of Graduate Biomedical Sciences, and Jennifer Hobin, Ph.D., Senior Science Policy Analyst, Office of Public Affairs, Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology (FASEB), developer of an online tool on the competencies for FASEB members. Each had served on the Core Competencies Committee when it was first struck.

A vigorous discussion period took place after their presentations which focused on perceived gaps in the application of the core competencies. Some concerns were raised in particular with respect to the appropriateness of the competencies for postdocs not in biomedical sciences disciplines. Audience members also pointed out items that were — on first pass — missing from the list of competencies (teaching, for example, which was later found under the “communication” competency). The panelists all noted that the core competencies were seen as a beginning. Institutions, professional associations, and even individual postdocs were intended to use the core competencies as a jumping-off point for further exploration, conversation and skill development. A final highlight of the plenary session was a discussion of how “mandatory” the core competencies ought to be, for postdocs, their mentors, and institutions as a whole. The session sparked thoughts on how to further educate postdocs and postdoc office administrators at my institution with regard to the core competencies.

This plenary panel highlighted the clear reasons for attending an NPA Annual Meeting: Enthusiastic discussion, educational and informative presentations, and opportunities to network about ways to improve the postdoctoral experience with like-minded people from across the continent. Indeed, with the careful planning of the NPA’s Meetings Committee and staff, and with the support of our sponsors and participating organizations, this Annual Meeting raised the bar on networking and learning opportunities, and the delegates responded with an incredible energy level.

Meeting attendees came from across the United States — with two delegates from Canada — and represented the full spectrum of stakeholders in the postdoctoral experience. Such a broad range of backgrounds and experiences lent itself well to excellent and vibrant discussions at the 2011 Annual Meeting. It is the NPA’s strong hope that meeting attendees take full advantage of the networks and collaborations built in Bethesda to continue to improve the postdoctoral experience across the country — and then come back to showcase their efforts at next year’s Annual Meeting!

The 2012 NPA Annual Meeting, which will be sponsored by the University of California (UC), marks an important milestone in the life of the NPA. It is our 10th anniversary annual meeting, and fittingly, we will return to California, to hold the meeting at the Sir Francis Drake Hotel, San Francisco, on March 16-18, 2012.

---

This meeting is of particular importance for UC as the first and fifth NPA Annual Meetings were held on the UC Berkeley campus in 2001 and 2006. Again, UC postdocs, postdoc leaders and postdoc office staff and administrators will have an opportunity to share their experiences and knowledge. As information about the upcoming NPA Annual Meeting becomes available, it will be posted to the NPA website — workshop and poster submissions will be encouraged in the coming months. Looking forward to seeing you in San Francisco next year!
THE BERKELEY POSTDOCTORAL ASSOCIATION CONTINUES TO ADVOCATE

tips on how to navigate the process of being a new postdoc at UC Berkeley, and resources on Bay Area housing, shopping, transportation, and other orientation guidelines, are also found there. These latter resources are especially helpful for Berkeley’s large international postdoc population (>72%).

Berkeley postdocs at 2010 Summer social

The BPA has broadened its relationships within UC Berkeley, including deepening connections with the Career Center, the Office of Intellectual Property and Industry Research Alliances, and the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research. These collaborations were essential to developing the previously-featured and innovative Postdoc Industry Exploration Program (PIEP) which has strengthened postdoc networking relationships both within UC Berkeley and with the greater local biotech community.

Success in these arenas bolstered the credibility of the BPA on the UC Berkeley campus and furthered the breadth of advocacy efforts toward improving postdoc life. New BPA efforts are to initiate new programs based on the current needs of our postdocs. For example, we are establishing a Postdoc Entrepreneurship Program that aims to provide postdocs access to an entrepreneur-minded community and insight into the mechanisms behind launching a start-up company. We are also working to reduce public transportation and recreational sports facilities fees, as well as coordinating with the University housing offices to provide prioritized housing for postdocs, regardless of marital status. Moreover, we are working to increase the visibility and success of postdocs on campus by establishing more teaching, mentoring, and networking opportunities, as well as building new relationships with campus entities, such as the Academic Senate, and with the community.

The increasing number of volunteer members has greatly enhanced the BPA’s success. We have found that postdocs are genuinely excited to be part of a community and support system directly targeted at issues and challenges that affect the postdoc lifestyle and experience. All UC Berkeley postdocs are welcomed and encouraged to be active in the BPA to contribute to existing programs or offer ideas for new initiatives. The relationships made today with the BPA will have a great impact on tomorrow.

UC Berkeley Postdoc Team Has Breadth and Depth

Castañeda has been responsible for making sure that postdocs are taken care of since postdoc issues were first taken up by faculty and administrators around the country in the late 1990s. In fact, Castañeda worked with Dr. Joseph Cerny, a faculty member in the Department of Chemistry, and former Dean of the Graduate Division and Vice Chancellor for Research, at UC Berkeley, and was involved with the National Academies of Science’s Committee on Science, Engineering, and Public Policy (COSEPUP). It was this Committee that produced one of the first and foremost postdoc publications, Enhancing the Postdoctoral Experience, in 2000.

Since that time, Castañeda has worked in conjunction with the UC Berkeley Vice Chancellor for Research Faculty Committee on Postdoc Affairs, becoming the first UC campus with a postdoc oversight team staffed by faculty and administrators. Together they have been instrumental in securing a number of other “firsts.” Numbered among them are: a UC Berkeley Ombudsperson for postdocs; full access for postdocs to the Career Center which includes customized services for humanities and social science postdocs; a dedicated full-time postdoc benefits officer; a campus-wide postdoc faculty mentoring award; English as a second language courses; the establishment of the Postdoc Industry Exploration Program; and the postdoc spousal support program. Castañeda’s office also ensures that postdocs have access to many other events offered via a variety of campus service providers.

The VSPA Program regularly sponsors (and co-sponsors) workshops on campus. Dozens of topics have been covered over the years, including grant and scientific-paper writing, careers in bioscience outside of academia, fostering research independence, opportunities in industry versus the academy, as well as immigration, professional networking and many others, given by leaders and professionals on these topics. A monthly postdoc orientation has also been developed to let incoming postdocs know about the resources on campus available to them. It is offered the first Thursday of each month at Berkeley’s International House.

Through these events, and other contact with postdocs, Castañeda is able to get feedback on the programs offered and the needs of postdocs, which contributes to the constant improvement of these programs as well as the development of new ones. In addition, through campus support, Castañeda is able to participate in national and international programs and trainings which serve to ensure that UC Berkeley’s program has not overlooked ways to further support postdocs; and to increase Castañeda’s awareness of their potential needs. Examples of such events include Castañeda’s ongoing participation in the National Postdoctoral Association, as well as, in recent years, his involvement in a NAFSA-sponsored delegation to China for the purpose of raising awareness of cultural differences, thus exploring the specific needs of Chinese scholars in the U.S.

Future plans for UC Berkeley’s postdoctoral support include a postdoctoral teaching program with local community colleges and universities, and designated postdoc housing on campus. In addition, steps have been taken toward finding new ways to enhance and further develop mentoring of postdocs on campus. Fleming believes that the new Postdoc Industry Exploration Program is a terrific example of the kinds of programs that would round out a suite of mentoring opportunities for postdocs. In fact grant proposals to the NIH and the
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Postdoc Newsletter

NSF now require a mentoring component for postdocs. Across the UC, attention is being paid to how best to provide institutional services to help faculty put together appropriately customized mentoring plans for postdocs.

UC Berkeley is lucky to have Sam Castañeda, the Berkeley Postdoctoral Association, the VSRA Program, as well as a legacy of thoughtful and supportive Vice Chancellors for Research, such as Dr. Fleming, to not only think about how to best support the postdoc experience at UC Berkeley, but to make it happen over time.

To learn more about the union contract, download it from the PRO-UAW or UCOP web pages. To discuss terms and conditions of a postdoctoral appointment, postdocs can contact:

PRO/UAW -- 510-549-3863
UC Office of the President -- 510-987-9484

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

UAW/UC Postdoc Union Contract Implementation Continues

Since August of 2010, the PRO-UAW Local 5810 and the UC Office of the President (UCOP), Office of Labor Relations, have been working to implement the contract ratified between the union and the University of California. Fall and winter efforts began the process of implementing dues and fees, as well as new salaries, and the union put bylaws into place.

This spring brought continued efforts to complete implementation. In April, 2011, UAW Local 5810 held its first election for statewide and campus union positions. As specified by the bylaws, the elected Executive Board is comprised of statewide officers. Members also elected Head Stewards from each campus. The Joint Council is comprised of the Executive Board as well as the Head Stewards. The newly elected Executive Board and Joint Council members include postdocs from nine campuses and from many different departments, including Biology, Physics, Engineering, Ocean Sciences and Psychology. The new officers are looking forward to working together to improve postdocs’ training experience at UC and continuing the constructive relationship with the university, in particular with the UC administrators responsible for postdoctoral affairs.

In the past few months, UAW Local 5810 has also been continuing to work with the University to educate postdocs, administrators and faculty members about the new contract and to implement the contract properly. Ongoing issues to be resolved as they come up include contractually-guaranteed rights to salary, health care, time off, etc. Many questions are resolved as they come up because of the complex nature of some of the contract stipulations.

For example, the NIH has just announced the new experience-level salary/stipend scale, which the UC adopted June 1, 2011. The scale, however, only establishes salary minima and principal investigators can always pay more, provided grants and funding support it.

In addition, as per the contract, current UC postdocs move to new salaries upon their reappointment and/or anniversary, provided the increase is 3% or less. Postdocs currently paid more than 3% below scale will receive a 3% increase, yet may remain below scale. Postdocs paid at or above scale will receive a 2% increase annually or at their appointment anniversary. Details are explained in Article 4 of the contract.