Welcome to the Issue 11 of the UC Postdoc Newsletter! This time, we focus on UC Berkeley, with its many impressive offerings for postdocs. Of all the UC campuses, Berkeley is the most equipped to offer services to you and your family, thanks in no small part to the Visiting Scholars and Postdoctoral Affairs (VSPA) Program. You can see all the VSPA Program offerings at a glance below, and read about many of them in more detail in this issue.

In addition, we bring together all the people and places for postdocs at UC Berkeley. In particular, we showcase the vision of the Vice Chancellor for Research, Graham Fleming, and the experiences of the other senior administrators on his team. Many of the academics and support people who work with postdocs at UC Berkeley are thinking about the current economic situation and its implications for postdocs wanting to enter academia. UC Berkeley offers many focused interventions to help postdocs understand the current professional landscape, and to plan for your dream or alternative career options.

Postdocs also feature extensively in this newsletter. Many of the programs and services at UC Berkeley are initiatives that arose from the work of postdocs themselves. In particular, many postdocs are taking responsibility for widening their range of skills and career options in innovative and interesting ways. They are also building community for themselves and their families during their time in Berkeley.

I’d also like to draw your attention to this issue’s special column on same-sex partners in the wake of the Supreme Court’s ruling on the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA).

It is with great pleasure that we bring you this issue of the Postdoc Newsletter. It has been interesting and informative, working with the dedicated people at UC Berkeley, finding out about the postdoc landscape at this time of national economic transition. I hope you enjoy reading this issue of the Postdoc Newsletter as much as I enjoyed putting it together.

-Natasha Distiller, Editor-In-Chief

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**WHO’S WHO**

for postdocs at UC Berkeley

Graham Fleming, Vice Chancellor and head of Research Office
Read more about Graham Fleming

Robert Price, Associate Vice Chancellor for Research
Read more about Robert Price

Sam Castañeda, Director, Visiting Scholar & Postdoc Affairs program
Read more about Sam Castañeda

**WHAT’S WHAT**

for postdocs at UC Berkeley

VSPA Programs and Affiliates

Calcierge faculty recruitment and retention services
International House
Berkeley Postdoctoral Association (BPA)
Berkeley Postdoctoral Entrepreneur Program (BPEP)
Berkeley Spouses and Partners
Language and Communication
Postdoc Industry Exploration Program (PIEP)
Professional Development Presentations

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establish supportive mentoring relationship peers. Dr. Pauly is currently developing a Postdoc Management Development Institute for UC Berkeley postdocs and visiting scholars.

Natalie Reid is a visiting scholar at UC Berkeley. She gives lectures on getting published in international journals to graduate students, visiting scholars, and postdocs for whom English is a second or third language. She is also an international consultant, offering courses and consultation in academic writing, journal analysis, and Anglo-American argumentation to researchers and Ph.D. students throughout Europe. Read about Natalie’s book, Getting Published in International Journals.

Toby Freedman teaches classes in career development for the life sciences at UC Berkeley Extension, and is the Program Chair for the BioScience Forum, a non-profit educational forum serving the Bay Area biotechnology community. A scientist by training, she transitioned into business as a recruiter, writer, and entrepreneur. She is the author of Career Opportunities in Biotechnology and Drug Development, and Founder/President of Synapsis Search, which is focused on executive R&D and business placements in the life sciences industry.

Jean-luc Doumont is an engineer from the Louvain School of Engineering with a PhD in applied physics from Stanford University. Jean-luc now devotes his time and energy to training scientists, engineers, and others in effective communication and related themes. A popular invited speaker at top-ranked universities worldwide, he has been addressing grad students and postdocs at UC Berkeley almost every year for the last 10 years. He is the author of the critically acclaimed book, Trees, maps, and theorems on “effective communication for rational minds” and of the Nature series English communication for scientists on nature.com. For more information on Jean-luc, visit his company’s website.

Andrew Green, Career Center. Andrew is Associate Director of the Career Center at Berkeley. He also serves as a PhD counselor and advisor and is the go-to person for the VSPA Program in its postdoc collaborations with the Career Center. Read more about what the Career Center offers to postdocs.

Sherrin Loyd, Principal at VocalEase which runs pronunciation assistance courses with the VSPA Program. Read more.

Doug Kalish, founder of Doug’s Guides, which helps students and postdocs make the transition from academia to the business world. Doug has developed a quiz that helps you determine your work personality and get suggestions about what kinds of organizations are compatible with your work style. Take the quiz now. Doug is also a Visiting Scholar in the Management of Technology program at the Haas School of Business, UC Berkeley.

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.
Know It All?!  
by Tasha Belfiore

Brief comments and notices about articles, events, and resources that are of interest to postdocs.

Did you know…?
Whether you are a postdoc now, or just stepping out to another type of job, or if you’ve got a side job along with your postdoc, there is advice available from every corner on “how to succeed.” Use your common sense and never stop doing the best you can at whatever you were hired to do. But here is some input. Allison Vaillancourt [Chronicle of Higher Education, July 30, 2013, ‘Are You Managing Up?’] reminds us how important it is to figure out what your supervisor (e.g., faculty PI) wants from you, as much in style as in productivity, and to adapt a way to provide those things as much as you can. She points out that it helps to observe how others behave.

Vaillancourt goes on to wonder why certain very smart people (perhaps you?) don’t take social interactions more seriously [Chronicle of Higher Education, June 3, 2013, ‘Canine Career Tips’]. She describes a thesis of a book by Brian Hare on the history of dogs, which states that wild canids became friendly with humans to get what they wanted (food). Look where it got dogs. The best seat in the house!

Beyond managing workplace dynamics, we all know it’s important to keep up with resources for postdocs. Several new ones have popped up.

- The Chronicle of Higher Education, an important resource for academic job listings, has created a new job-assist page called Vitae, which will offer career advice and resources, summarized in a recent article [Chronicle of Higher Education, July 22, 2013, ‘Introducing Vitae, a New Online Service From the Chronicle’]
- The Chronicle is also hosting ‘The Adjunct Project’, a web-based survey/database intended to collect information about adjunct faculty positions around the country, and to disseminate this information.
- Pinterest, a social media tool that allows people to collect and post items of interest, has a postdoc advice page, for postdocs interested in tenure-track jobs! (Does this mean postdocs have “arrived” in the 21st century?)

Celebrating the Repeal of the Defense of Marriage Act’s (DOMA) Third Clause

On the national and international legal front, postdocs in same-sex marriages are likely celebrating the repeal of the Defense of Marriage Act’s (DOMA) third clause, which prevented same-sex married couples from receiving federal benefits that opposite-sex married couples received. However, state, private, and federal administrators of all kinds, find themselves at a loss for guidance on how this affects individual situations. There are now 36 U.S. states that fall into three different categories: 1) states with laws that forbid same-sex marriages; 2) states with laws that allow same-sex marriages; and 3) states that neither allow nor forbid such marriages.

- It is clear that in states that allow same-sex marriages, couples married in that or similar states are entitled to all federal benefits given to married couples, no matter the context.
- It is also known at this time that the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) issued a statement to immigration lawyers to start filing applications for spouses in same-sex marriages. No explicit or understood instructions were given regarding limits on where the U.S. citizen spouse has to live. Our own Adam Green (from Ask Adam immigration advice column) confirmed that these applications are going forward. And the same has been reported as far away as the Philippine Star!
- But, what happens if a UC postdoc in a same-sex marriage (married in a state that allows this—i’ll call these “legal same-sex marriages”) has a spouse living in a state that does not allow them? Will benefits accrue to that spouse?
- What if a UC postdoc in a legal same-sex marriage receives a federal fellowship to conduct research in a state that does not allow, or does not take a stand on same-sex marriages? Will that fellowship confer benefits to the spouse?
- Civil-rights legal scholars are unable to answer these and many other related questions at this time. Unless or until the President makes an executive order clarifying how agency policies should be carried forward, nationwide, or, alternatively, until each agency makes its own policy directives (which could vary in their breadth, agency by agency), each situation will have to be handled individually.
- In the absence of an executive order forcing federal benefit eligibility on all legally married same-sex couples in the U.S., the only route by which federal policy and benefits would be applied uniformly nationwide would be through another U.S. Supreme Court ruling.

Along with several other recent U.S. Supreme Court rulings, and some state court rulings, this is a very interesting and important time for civil rights evolution in this country!
Always crossing new frontiers:

UC BERKELEY'S

Visiting Scholar and
Postdoc Affairs Office

Natasha Distiller interviews
Sam Castañeda, Director of the VSPA

VSPA’s Sam Castañeda has a significant sense of UC Berkeley’s history. 18 years ago, then-graduate dean, Joseph Cerny, was at the forefront of a push to recognize postdocs, not only for the science they do, but for the employment protections they deserve. In those days, postdocs were on their own when it came to finding health insurance — which was probably the biggest mobilizing issue initially — and they received funding and access differently, depending on the source of their money. The situation was difficult: if you were pregnant, for example, you couldn’t get health insurance, since pregnancy was considered a pre-existing medical condition. Or if you went from being a graduate student to being a postdoc, you might go from having access to insurance to losing that access, if you were not an employee. Postdocs, says Sam, were “neither fish nor fowl.” They fell between the cracks, and as a result had very little systemic recognition, and lost out on the rights that come with it. Some postdocs had no library access, for example. Some had no campus email. They were taxed differently and had different protections.

Enter Sam, who, at the behest of Dean Cerny, set up the VSPA Program. Working with patience and diplomacy, Sam gradually chipped away at the existing structures to get all postdocs acknowledged as employees and grant them the requisite rights and privileges. He likens this process to glacial movement: “But by all accounts, many of which are provided elsewhere in this newsletter by the people who work with Sam, he is the person to move mountains, frozen or otherwise.”

What a different world it is today,” Sam says. Postdocs have gone from being an invisible population to being recognized as a vital part of the university’s life, and crucial to its future, and they are treated accordingly.

Under Sam’s guidance, VSPA has grown from a one-person organization in a cubicle to the fully staffed office it is today. It has achieved an enormous amount, including facilitating the development of all the programs at UC Berkeley outlined on page one of this newsletter. One of the VSPA Program’s focuses is on the language services which are so crucial to international postdocs, not just for the acquisition of American English, but for help in navigating the new academic and social cultures in the East Bay. Another is the Berkeley Postdoctoral Entrepreneur Program, one of the ways the VSPA helps postdocs think about their future career transitions. Sam also points to the Postdoc Industry Exploration Program, which gives postdocs the experience of getting to know industry alternatives to academia. Sam also talks with enthusiasm about the Berkeley Postdoctoral Association: “It’s not just about science,” he says, “Life-long friendships are made. These are really great people, who have fun together.”

One of the reasons VSPA has been so successful is because it works with the people it serves. UC Berkeley was the first university in the country to establish an office like the VSPA program, and the second campus in the nation to establish a Postdoc Association. Sam talks about how the administration recognized that change needed to come “from the top” and “from the bottom” simultaneously: the structures had to change, and they needed to change in collaboration with the postdocs themselves. The VSPA Program links the postdoc (and visiting scholar) population with the powers-that-be, something that Vice Chancellor of Research Graham Fleming confirmed when he told me that he is always open to hearing from the VSPA Program regarding new or pressing concerns that postdocs might be having.

There are two new frontiers on the VSPA Program’s horizon. “If postdocs were the invisible community of the past, their spouses are now the next population clearly in need of attention,” says Sam. “They have no campus access to anything except to psychological services.” VSPA has been involved in setting up a range of systems to address the needs of this important group of people, without whom the postdocs could not do their jobs.

But they are not just support staff. Sam recognizes that spouses and partners of postdocs are talented professionals in their own right. The new Spouses & Partners Program will strive to meet their needs and will continue to be responsive to what they have to say. “It is such an enriching experience, to have launched this program,” Sam says. He emphasizes that it was launched in collaboration with the spouses themselves, and mentions Yvonne Lefort, who worked for three years to help develop the program. Sam is particularly pleased that the need for childcare is now being recognized as crucial for this population, and he is hopeful that UC Berkeley will soon start working on finding more ways to provide it. The Spouses & Partners program already integrates childcare into its events, which can feel, says Sam, “like a wedding!” The program is now going to meet weekly to decide on its future programming. “Little by little,” Sam emphasizes, “things are going to improve for spouses and partners of postdocs. They deserve their own recognition. And they need a break.”
Graduate students and postdocs have always shared some space in the academic system. They work together in the same labs; 25% of UC Berkeley’s graduate students are international, and they receive services from the Berkeley International Office, as many postdocs do. In addition, graduate students can attend Visiting Scholar and Postdoc Affairs career and professional development workshops, and the Graduate Division offers workshops that are often available to postdocs as well. For example, every year, the Graduate Division offers a Summer Institute for Preparing Future Faculty to both graduate students and postdocs. This involves everything from an overview of the different academic institutes in the country to how to apply for jobs.

It’s not surprising, then, that postdocs are of interest to Vice Provost Andrew Szeri. They always have been. But recently, he has been involved in work that will be of special interest to postdocs as well as to their graduate student colleagues.

About a year ago, Vice Provost Szeri’s office embarked on a long-term PhD alumni survey. They received responses from several thousand UC Berkeley students who graduated up to 40 years ago. The findings are still preliminary, but what the research is suggesting is illuminating. Vice Provost Szeri says they are finding that there has been a marked increase in the number of postdocs in the social sciences and humanities among the more recent cohorts. In fact, these disciplines comprise the fastest-growing postdoc contingent in the sample, although they began from small numbers.

Vice Provost Szeri says his impression, looking at this data, is that the common wisdom that there are hardly any jobs for postdocs is not necessarily true.

The BPA has a unique function, beyond what the VSPA Program offers to postdocs. Ian points out that the BPA provides an important emotional base for new arrivals: “As we come here, we first meet the VSPA. They do a really good job in helping you to integrate with Berkeley, which is important especially if you’re from another country, as I am. To become part of the postdoc community, to get the more social support from peers, you come to the BPA.”

BPA President, Ian Cameron

“Energy + Continuity: the secrets to BPA’s success”

Natasha Distiller interviews Berkeley Postdoctoral Association President Ian Cameron

Ian Cameron is a Canadian scientist currently working at the Helen Wills Neuroscience Institute. He has been here for two and a half years, and leaves Berkeley soon for a Senior Researcher position in the Netherlands. He has greatly enjoyed his time on campus, and in the Berkeley Postdoctoral Association (BPA).

The BPA is the second oldest organization of its kind in the country. Ian attributes some of its success to its relationship with the Visiting Scholar and Postdoc Affairs (VSPA) Office. He says this partnership provides a dynamic combination of the energy of new people, which is supplied by the changing profile of the postdocs, and the continuity and support supplied by the VSPA office. At the monthly board meetings, he says, “new people bring in the current interests of the group of postdocs at any particular time,” and new initiatives begin all the time. VSPA is the permanent body that provides long-term thinking to the BPA. “That relationship is special. I’ve been on other organizations that didn’t have that institutional support, and new ideas can die without it,” Ian says.

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Dear Liliana,

I am the wife of a postdoc from China who is conducting research at UC Berkeley. Before I came to the United States, I worked as a critical care nurse with a prestigious private hospital in Beijing. Since my move here, I gave birth to my daughter who is a couple of years younger than my son. Although I am very busy with my new family, I have to admit that I miss working in my profession and feel that I am not going anywhere with my career.

Many times I have thought of leaving my husband here and going back to China where I have the support of my family and friends. Here in the East Bay, I can’t make friends for some reason. Please give me some kind of advice as to how I can feel better about myself.

Yours truly,
Desperate from China

Dear Desperate from China,

Spouses and partners of academics react differently to the difficult situation of having given up their own comfort zones and/ or careers. Our cultural backgrounds make a difference, as does the balance we’ve struck between having given up their own comfort zones and/ or careers.

I was learning, and my husband became my audience: he was stuck in the office all day, so most of the time I was his eyes and ears in the new world. I was reporting to him about my daily adventures and our marriage certainly benefited from this. And I felt I was building my own identity in this new environment.

I made new friends by going out a lot, striking up conversations with strangers, and taking advantage of all the social opportunities UC Berkeley has for spouses and partners. The Visiting Scholar and Postdoc Affairs Program has a sub-program especially for us, called, yes, The Berkeley Spouses and Partners Program. In addition to organizing networking opportunities and other chances to meet other, the Berkeley Spouses and Partners program offers entry into All Talks Considered, where our other halves talk about their work in an informal and accessible manner.

I found this really useful; it helped me to see what my hubby was up to, as well as to meet some of the people he was working with. The program also offers help with daily life, and with finding things to do with your kids, including providing information on daycare and schools. There’s a ton of other information on their website, including how you could get mental and physical healthcare support through the University. It sounds like it may be helpful for you to talk to someone, if that is something you feel comfortable doing. I know talking to a stranger isn’t always easy, but if things are really hard for you, it may be worth considering.

UC Berkeley does offer a range of services to help us make this difficult transition, besides access to formal talk therapy. Informal talks with new friends have been invaluable to me. Do you know International House? You can become a member and join in their social events, like salsa classes or film nights. You don’t say where you are living; I don’t know if you are aware that University Village in Albany also has special events for spouses of international postdocs, and their children. The University Section Club Center has weekly social meetings at the Berkeley YMCA. You can take your kids and get coffee and company.

You might also want to consider using this time to further your own education. You could choose from UC Berkeley Extension, or Berkeley Adult School, for example. You should also look at the website of CALcierge. You might also want to think about volunteering for one of the many places connected to campus. It’s a great way to meet people and to feel better about what you are doing with your time. And there is so much to do outdoors here, in this wonderfully mild climate.

I used these resources when I arrived. Suddenly I had my own circle of friends beyond my hubby’s colleagues. I was building my own new world and proving to myself that I could handle difficult times. You, no doubt, will benefit from the cultural enrichment you’re going to acquire here and probably learn a lot about yourself as well. So be brave, and be positive and proactive! Rather than being “Desperate from China”, try “Explorer from China” instead! Good luck. It’s not easy, but it’s worth it.

Love, Liliana

Liliana Cardile is an Italian journalist living in Berkeley. She used to cover international political issues and cross-cultural topics for a well-known Italian weekly publication. She also traveled internationally, shooting TV documentaries, and worked on Italian TV as an anchorwoman.

Liliana met her husband in China where she was spending a sabbatical year learning Mandarin. Five days after their marriage, in 2008, she moved to the U.S. with him when her husband began a teaching career at UC Berkeley. In the Bay Area she became officially a “spouse” and her two children were born in Berkeley. She has always been focused on making the most of this experience.
The VSPA Program also has extensive links with other organizations that help postdocs improve their language skills. Special programs developed by the VSPA Program include All Talks Considered, which helps postdocs learn to talk about their work to a broad audience, an experience in comprehensibility which is crucial for the job market. In addition, postdocs can attend The Language Company (TLC), a private organization with 14 schools through the U.S. Since 2011, TLC has partnered with the VSPA Program to teach English, academic survival skills, and helps students with cultural adaptation to American academia.

The VSPA Program also offers access to Toastmasters International, an international non-profit organization that focuses on developing members’ leadership, communication, and public speaking skills.

For many international postdocs, for whom English is a second or further language, learning to communicate appropriately in the American academic environment is crucial. Even for those who have English as a first language, interacting in American English means learning a new set of expressions and expectations when it comes to written or oral presentations in the workplace, not to mention a new cultural vocabulary.

It is heartening to know, then, that the Visiting Scholar and Postdoc Affairs (VSPA) Program offers a range of language and communication courses to help with everything from presentation competency in academic settings to guidance on Pronouncing American English (PAE), for international scholars who struggle to be properly understood.

Sherrin Loyd is principal and executive speech and voice coach at VocalEase, which runs the PAE class. VocalEase offers a dynamic class in PAE to postdocs, visiting scholars and visiting student researchers who come to Berkeley from all over the world. At the beginning of the class, PAE students typically know they have trouble being understood by native English speakers, but they are not sure why. “Our students are very intelligent, but most people have never had this kind of training before,” says Loyd.

You say potato...”
Learning Academic English in America

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Ask Adam

QUESTION:
Dear Adam,
I am a Japanese postdoc on a J-1 visa at UC Merced with funding until September 30, 2013. After that time I would like to visit Mexico for a few weeks and then go directly to Canada for a week. After my three week vacation I would like to return to my apartment in Merced and then begin moving my possessions back to Japan. Please tell me if it is OK to stay in the U.S. for at least two weeks after my week in Canada. If so, how long can I stay in the U.S.? I would like to stay as long as possible before returning to Japan.

ANSWER:
First, please verify whether or not a visa is required for you to visit either Canada or Mexico by contacting the consulate or its website. Assuming that your DS 2019 form has an end date of September 30, you are lawfully permitted to remain in the US for an additional 30 days, until October 30.

Since you are travelling internationally before October 30, upon your return from Mexico to the U.S. you will be asked how long you are returning for. At that time, you would show your plane ticket to Canada and be admitted in the WT visa waiver status for 90 days. But to board the plane, you must register for ESTA (Electronic System for Travel Authorization). This is an automated system that assists in determining the eligibility of an individual to travel to the United States.

Keep in mind that you are not permitted to work while in WT visa waiver status. You might also be asked by the immigration officer to provide evidence that you have sufficient funds to support yourself while in the U.S. Upon your return from Canada to the U.S. again, you will be asked by U.S. immigration about your intentions and must show a plane ticket to another country during the 90 days for which you will be admitted.

I also want you to know that if you are admitted in WT visa waiver status, no extensions of stay beyond the 90 day period are permitted. In addition, you are not eligible to apply for a change of status back to J-1 or H1-B even if you find employment during this period. In that case, you would have to apply for one of the work visas outside of the U.S.

Adam Green, Attorney at Law, Los Angeles, CA
Law Offices of Adam Green
Adam Green’s extensive practice and involvement in Immigration Law spans two decades.
Andrew Green, Senior Assistant Director of the UC Berkeley Career Center, has a favorite metaphor for understanding the possibilities open to postdoctoral students once their contracts come to an end. “I like to think of a series of concentric circles that represent the fields you could work in,” he says. “You stand at the epicenter. The first circle is your field, where you use the same substantive skills and knowledge that you have developed as a postdoc, within a university. The next concentric circle out is using those same skills in the same broad field, but now in a different context: a National Lab, say. Another concentric circle is, maybe you’re someone who is a computational biologist, and now you’re looking at computational data sets, maybe the migration patterns of whales, but still within science. Another concentric circle out is, now you’re working in analytics. Another circle out is management consulting, where they are looking for intelligent problem-solvers.”

It’s an infinite regress, he says. What you need, and what the Career Center can help you to develop, is to think about yourself and your knowledge base and skill set as widely as possible.

Most of the UC campuses have a career center, but what Berkeley offers which is unusual is a set of services geared specifically to postdocs. This is thanks to an ongoing partnership between the Career Center and the Visiting Scholar and Postdoc Affairs (VSPA) Program. Career centers are funded by student registration fees, and so most other campuses cannot afford to include postdocs in their career center services the way UC Berkeley can, thanks to the VSPA Program partnership. To Andrew, it is important that UC Berkeley acknowledges that postdocs “need as much career advice as PhDs and other young academics, and belong to a population that serves the university so strongly.” This is particularly so at the moment. “In a funding environment where it’s clear that a significant number of postdocs, no matter how well they perform, will never have tenure-track positions, it’s imperative that we help them with alternative options,” he says.

Mary M. Mitchell, of the Mitchell Organization, came to UC Berkeley in the summer to present her nationally-acclaimed workshop, Schmooze or Lose. Mary is a business etiquette guru and media personality. She has nine books in ten languages, newspaper columns, online forums, and countless radio and television shows, where she details how social, presentation and communications skills are the keys to personal and professional success.
There are four offices that respond to the needs of postdocs at UC Berkeley. The Visiting Scholar and Postdoc Affairs (VSPA) Program, run by director Sam Castañeda, is unique to this campus, and is central to the welfare of its postdocs. The Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research (VCRO) is assisted by Associate Vice Chancellor for Research Robert Price, and oversees the activities of the VSPA Program. The Academic Personnel Office (APO), and the Labor Relations Office make up the administrative arms concerned with contractual issues for postdocs at UC Berkeley.

I spoke with Laura Mays and Heather Archer, of the VCRO and the APO respectively, to find out more about how the administration works for postdocs at UC Berkeley. Together, Laura and Heather work to protect postdocs’ labor rights, advocate for a fair wage, manage the needs of faculty and researchers, and work with appropriate contracts. I was struck by the passion and commitment of both Laura and Heather in their efforts to simplify the postdoc experience of working with the university administration. While the VSPA Program is the main point of contact for visiting scholars and postdocs alike, “The postdocs should know all four offices are all looking out for them in our own way, and we all work together,” Heather told me. “We do the legwork, so that postdocs don’t have to run around and figure it all out.”

Heather’s office, the APO, is charged with implementing all policy changes and other directives from the Office of the President. The APO was also the UC office that worked to apply the terms of the newly implemented United Auto Workers/UC (UAW/UC) contract to the UC Berkeley campus, a process that Heather found very gratifying, since it helped to standardize access to rights across the UC system and within the different colleges, schools and organized research units. The APO also works with the UC-wide standard five-year term limit for postdocs, and with the UAW/UC union contract, or suggestions from the VSPA Program. The APO is also the office that approves transitions to other academic appointments, as faculty, or researcher, or project scientist. And since the reality for postdocs is fluid, Heather has to be constantly on the ball: “We consider postdocs an important part of our big picture. Things are always changing for them, as the larger environment changes, so they are a dynamic part of what we do. They are constantly on our radar.”

"We don’t turn anybody away. I really do take pride in supporting this community"
— Laura Mays

Associate Vice Chancellor for Research (AVC-R) Robert Price is a political scientist, which makes him one of the few academics who is not in the hard sciences involved with postdocs at UC Berkeley. Since hard scientists make up the majority of the postdocs in the university system here and, indeed, everywhere, I asked AVC-R Price how he ended up working with the Vice Chancellor for Research, Graham Fleming, himself a Professor of Chemistry. AVC-R Price affirmed that he got the job of AVC-R because he is a social scientist. The Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research recognized that it needed an AVC-R who knew about the social sciences precisely because the field of postdoctoral research is so dominated by hard scientists. As someone who comes from the area of the humanities and social sciences myself, I was pleased to find this evidence that there is a small but significant representation of those fields in the postdoc enterprise at UC Berkeley.

AVC-R Price says that, as a political scientist, he jumped at the chance to learn about the mystifying workings of academic administration when he was offered the position of AVC-R. And in fact, he has particularly enjoyed learning more about the dynamic scientific and engineering enterprise at UC Berkeley. He has learned more about a wider range of things than he ever thought he would: “Patent and licensing, running an animal facility… I find it fascinating.”

The Office of Vice Chancellor for Research recognizes the centrality of postdocs to the campus research community, AVC-R Price told me. It was in recognition of this that the Visiting Scholar and Postdoc Affairs (VSPA) Program was created.

“Getting Creative Who’s working for Postdocs at UC Berkeley?”

“Social Scientist in the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research at UC Berkeley

Meet Robert Price, Associate Vice Chancellor for Research

“It’s a competitive world; we have a real interest in making the postdoc experience here as good as it can be”
— Robert Price, Associate Vice Chancellor for Research

Read more. »
Shirley Silveira is the Postdoctoral Benefits Coordinator at UC Berkeley. She has been with the program since it started in 2004. While postdocs have had a great health and welfare insurance benefit program available to them at UC Berkeley ever since the Postdoctoral Scholars Benefit Program (PSBP) began, Shirley says that right now is an especially “good time to be a postdoc.” She explains that the goal has always been that each type of postdoc (there are three in total: postdoctoral scholar-employee, postdoctoral scholar-fellow, and postdoctoral scholar paid-direct) on each campus in the UC system would have all their benefits covered equally by the university. As of July 1 this year, aside from a small monthly contribution each postdoc must make, this became a long envisioned reality. Shirley is very excited about this development.

The benefits include the full range of health and welfare benefits: medical, dental, vision, accidental death and dismemberment, workers compensation, short-term disability, as well as medical evacuation and medical repatriation benefits. Shirley administers this program and counsels postdocs on the ins and outs of accessing their benefits: she is the person to contact if you have any questions, problems, or needs in this regard. She will work with you, as well as with the Visiting Scholar and Postdoc Affairs (VSPA) Program, departmental administrators, and the Garnett Powers & Associates account manager, Lisa Walters, to address any issues you may have.

Deborah Cohen, Labor Relations Advocate, says that postdocs are an interesting group to work with, since they are a very self-motivated bunch. “We don’t tend to get a lot of the usual problems, around pay or leave,” she says. But there are some specific issues that are coming up, because of the unique nature of the postdoc job. She explains: “The job duties are not always clearly defined, so sometimes we need to work on the communication between the postdocs and the department: expectations, timing of projects, that kind of thing needs to be made explicit.” The relationship is not just employer-employee, she says. It also has a mentor-mentee component, and this can be more difficult to quantify. For these reasons, disagreements can arise between postdocs and their PIs or departments.

Deborah takes a proactive, resolution-oriented approach to working with the labor issues that do arise. Most of the time, she says, problems occur because postdocs feel unable to articulate their concerns, sometimes because they don’t know how (as opposed to feeling like they can’t). It really is a communication issue, she emphasizes. “I try to understand what the tensions are, and to suggest solutions,” she says. Most of the time she is able to get things “back on track” by working with departments before a situation escalates. “Even if I feel discipline or termination might be an option, I try to find other alternatives first,” Deborah says.

Generally, labor contract grievances are averted. The Labor Relations office works in collaboration with the union, and Deborah works closely with union representatives who are assisting postdocs through the dispute resolution process. For the most part “It’s a friendly, collaborative relationship, between the postdocs and the university,” says Deborah.
To Your Vitality!
A Column on Healthcare and Related Issues for Postdocs in the UC Postdoctoral Scholar Benefits Program

By Joan Garnett, Executive Vice President of Garnett Powers and Associates

The Cream of the Crop: Twelve Top Performers of Nature’s Bounty

As a breast cancer survivor of 4 years and screaming toward 5, I can’t begin to describe the enormous amount of nutritional information I’ve read on how to 1) keep cancer from returning, and 2) how to keep it from making its horrid appearance in the first place. I thought at some point I’d tire of evaluating the hundreds of articles that come my way monthly from various sources regarding what and what not to consume for cancer prevention. Most of my sources provide convincing evidence from recent studies and research, some of those sources being Realage.com, Drweil.com (Dr. Andrew Weil) and Kriscarr.com (Kris Carr, a previously terminal cancer survivor who totally turned her life around and stopped cancer in its tracks by becoming vegan) to name a few, all pretty trustworthy in the research they reference and in the delivery of quality nutritional information.

But I’ve never tired of continually digesting all of this material (no pun intended). I guess you could say I’ve become even more hooked on learning all I can about using a nutritional arsenal to keep my body cancer-free and to keep my immune system in fine working order.

So, I thought I’d share with you some of what I term ‘Nature’s Top Performers’, those fruits and vegetables that not only help in arming the immune system with antioxidants to fight oxidative stress but actually make you feel great by providing energizing nutrients. Not all of them are necessarily cancer-fighters; but many of them are just super stars in keeping the circulatory, digestive, immune, lymphatic, respiratory, urinary and nervous systems healthy, and boosting the immune system to fight any viral or bacterial intruder.

I’ll try to keep my enthusiasm in check as I talk about my great multi-colored buddies that have put that happy, energetic, bouncing stride in my step, and increase my confidence that I will keep cancer at bay. I try to eat at least 10 of these examples of nature’s bounty daily (I know, sounds like a lot, but I put at least half of those in a morning smoothie every day). It’s also important to know that there is a list of twelve fruits and veggies that are known as the ‘dirty dozen’, that are very important to buy organic due to the presence of harmful pesticides (I downloaded an app to my iPhone called Dirty Dozen to guide me when I shop for produce). I’ll mark those that appear on my list with a ‘DD’ so you know which to purchase as organic (or grow in your own garden!).

And the winners are:

CLOSING WORDS
From the man in charge of it all: GRAHAM FLEMING

Graham Fleming, Vice Chancellor for Research (VC-R) at UC Berkeley, is the head of the office responsible for postdocs. He oversees all the impressive work detailed in this newsletter, and has a few words of advice for postdocs.

VC-R Fleming points out that there are two important ways the university serves its diverse postdoc population. “Many, if not most, of our postdocs come here thinking they will go into an academic career. After a while many of them realize that this may not be the case, and it’s our responsibility to provide them with alternatives,” he says. Accordingly, his office has overseen the development of the access to industry programs you have read more about in this newsletter. VC-R Fleming also highlights the importance of developing entrepreneurial skills. Towards this end, his office has set up Skydeck, a start-up incubator that provides guidance and mentoring to enable big ideas to soar. Skydeck has space guaranteed for those postdocs who want to access the start-up support provided there.

“Postdocs are a crucial piece of the intellectual landscape at UC Berkeley. We’d be much poorer without them.”

– Graham Fleming, Vice Chancellor for Research

VC-R Fleming is also aware of the challenges for postdocs who are not American. From access to housing to language skills and cultural competency, VC Fleming reiterates that international postdocs need specific kinds of support. And if international visitors need one kind of help, all postdocs need help making connections between disciplines, labs, and projects. “Berkeley is a huge campus, and internal communication can be spotty. It’s really important, and really difficult, to keep up with what your fellow postdocs are doing,” he says. He applauds postdocs for taking the initiative in setting up ways to talk to each other.

He also mentions Sam Castañeda’s current efforts to bring Humanities and Social Studies postdocs into the bigger picture. “Sam has done a terrific job in providing services to the postdocs,” he says. You can read more about this new initiative, and about the other services, in the interview with Sam Castañeda.