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**National Postdoctoral Association**  
1200 New York Ave. NW, Suite 635  
Washington, D.C. 20005  
202-326-6424  
202-371-9849 (FAX)  
info@nationalpostdoc.org  
Andrew Hebbeler, PhD, Editor-in-Chief  
Ian Brooks, PhD, Associate Editor

# The POSTDOCKET

The Official Newsletter of the National Postdoctoral Association

## Cancer Researcher Elected Chair of NPA Board

*Cathee Johnson Phillips*

Stacy Gelhaus, PhD, has been elected to serve as Chair of the Board of Directors of the National Postdoctoral Association (NPA). Gelhaus is a postdoctoral fellow in the Center for Cancer Pharmacology, directed by Ian Blair, at the University of Pennsylvania. Gelhaus has served on the NPA board since January 2008. Her one-year term as Chair begins on January 1, 2009.

Gelhaus said, "I am very honored to have been elected Chair of the NPA Board. The NPA is a young organization that has had great success already in providing postdocs with a unified voice, and I hope to strengthen its national presence during my tenure as Chair."

Gelhaus received her Bachelor's degree in biology and biochemistry from Mount Saint Mary's University, and completed her PhD in analytical chemistry at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC). Her doctoral research examined novel separations of nucleic acids

using ion-pairing reversed-phase high performance liquid chromatography (IP-RPLC). Currently, Gelhaus studies the metabolic activation of environmental carcinogens and their contribution to lung cancer. Among her many awards is the National Research Service Award (NRSA), which she received from the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences in 2007. In addition to her research interests, Gelhaus has been very active as a member of the Biomedical Postdoc Council at Penn, and has served as co-Chair of that group since 2006.



Stacy Gelhaus, PhD, will serve as Chair of the NPA Board of Directors

*Cathee Johnson Phillips is Executive Director of the NPA.*

## NPA Welcomes New Board Members

*Ian Brooks*

The National Postdoctoral Association (NPA) is pleased to announce the election of five new members to the NPA Board of Directors. The new members were elected from a field of eleven candidates to fill three postdoctoral scholar positions and two non-postdoc positions. NPA Executive Director Cathee Johnson Phillips, said, "The NPA is fortunate to

have had such an outstanding slate of candidates, and we are very excited to welcome these new directors to the Board. I am so impressed with the high caliber of those who serve on our Board, and the new members continue this tradition of excellence. I can't say enough good things about the dedication of the NPA Board. The members are passionate about supporting the postdoctoral community and research enterprise in the United States."

**Ian Brooks** received his PhD from Penn State in 2003 and is currently a postdoc **Board, continued on page 2**

# NPA Prepares for Upcoming 7th Annual Meeting in Houston

Brenda Timmons

The Meetings Committee is gearing up for the NPA's Seventh Annual Meeting that will take place in Houston, Texas, on March 27-29 of 2009 at The University of Texas M. D. Anderson Cancer Center. This year's institutional hosts include M. D. Anderson, UT Health Science Center at Houston and Baylor College of Medicine.

The mission of the Annual Meeting is to bring together all stakeholders interested in postdoctoral education in order to address the needs of postdocs and facilitate change at both the national and local level. Following a similar format from previous years, an opening day of Postdoc Association (PDA) and Postdoc Office (PDO) leadership workshops is designed to help postdocs and administrators with issues involved in creating and maintaining a vibrant PDA and/or PDO. A joint PDA/PDO session at the conclusion of the day will allow postdocs and administrators to work together to find solutions to problems identified earlier in the day.

The committee is very excited about Saturday's events including an interactive plenary with Peter Fiske, PhD, author of several books including *Put Your Science to Work: The Take-Charge Career Guide for Scientists*. Fiske will present practical career strategies and tactics that postdocs can use to increase their chances of finding a satisfying and fulfilling professional path. Following our traditional networking luncheon, the 2009 keynote address will be given by Peter Doherty, PhD.



Nobel Laureate, Peter Doherty, PhD, will give the Keynote Address at the 2009 Annual Meeting of the NPA

Doherty was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine in 1996 for his groundbreaking work on the immune response system. Today, he splits his time between the University of Tennessee Health Science Center in Memphis and the University of Melbourne, Australia. He has authored several books including *The Beginner's Guide to Winning the Nobel Prize: Advice for Young Scientists*. Saturday evening will conclude with a "Texas-style BBQ" at the Institute of Molecular Medicine at the UT Health Science Center. Sunday's half-day events include a panel discussion on implementing individual development plans (IDPs) with representatives from institutions who have successfully incorporated IDPs into their curricula. The topics for the workshops will be announced on the Annual Meeting Web site closer to the event.

There will be ample time during breaks, receptions, and Friday evening "dine arounds" for networking, which is one of the most valued features of the conference each year. The Meetings Committee is currently soliciting nominations for the Distinguished Service Award, which in 2009 will honor an institution or entity that has demonstrated a profound, sustained, or leadership contribution to improving the postdoctoral training experience. Information on the nomination process is available on the NPA Web site. The calls for poster abstracts and travel award applications will go out in the coming weeks, with submission deadlines early in 2009. Information about lodging is currently on the Web page and information about online meeting registration will soon follow. Please visit the NPA Web site *Brenda Timmons, PhD, is a Postdoctoral Fellow at UT Southwestern Medical Center and Chair of the NPA Meetings Committee.*

**Board**, continued from page 1

in the Department of Pharmacology at the University of Tennessee Health Science Center in Memphis, TN. He served as inaugural Chair of the UTHSC Postdoc Association and is active in the NPA. He is an Associate Editor for the POSTDOCKET and a member of the NPA's Resource Development and Advocacy Committees.

**Lori Conlan** is Director of the Office of Postdoctoral Services (OPS) at the National Institute of Health (NIH) in Bethesda, Maryland. Conlan earned her PhD in biochemistry and biophysics at Texas A&M University at College Station, Texas, in 2002. She has served as OPS Director at NIH since March 2008 and previously was Program Director for Science Alliance at the New York Academy of Sciences.

**Audrey Ellerbee** is a Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of Chemistry and Chemical Biology at Harvard University while on leave from a faculty position at Stanford University. Ellerbee received her PhD from the Department of Biomedical Engineering at Duke University in 2007.

**Daniel Gorelick** holds an American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) Science & Technology Policy Fellowship at the U.S. Department of State, Bureau of International Information Programs, in Washington, DC. Gorelick earned a PhD in cellular and molecular medicine from Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine in Baltimore, Maryland in 2005.

**Richard Nowakowski** is a Professor and Director of the Postdoctoral Career Development Program at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey-Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, Piscataway, New Jersey. Nowakowski is Co-Director of the Graduate Program in Biomedical Engineering.

*Ian Brooks, PhD, is an Associate Editor at The POSTDOCKET.*

# From J to Where? Immigration options for Foreign-born Postdocs

Adam Frank and Brendan Delaney

*The information contained within this article is for informational purposes only and is not legal advice or a substitute for legal counsel, nor does it constitute advertising or a solicitation.*

What can you do when you are on a J-Visa that is about to expire? While several options exist for postdocs, we would like to review two of the more common visas that individuals pursue after the expiration of their J-1 visa: the H-1B Visa and the O-1 Visa.

## H-1B Visa

In order to qualify for an H-1B visa, you must have a Bachelor's degree or higher, and the position being sought must require such a degree. Usually this does not present an issue to postdocs. However the major problem with the H-1B visa is that it has a cap and only a limited number of these visas are available each fiscal year (October 1 - September 30). While 65,000 visas are issued annually, an additional 20,000 are issued for those who received a Master's degree or higher from a U.S. institution of higher education. Last year, more than 250,000 people applied, which resulted in a lottery system to determine which of the applicants would receive an H-1B visa.

However, through cap-exempt organizations (government and non-profit research organizations, universities and non-profits associated with these two types of organizations) it is possible to obtain an H-1B without being subject to the cap. A position at one of these organizations allows you to file for, and start, your H-1B status at any time. Additionally, if your physical work location is at one of these types of organizations, you are exempt from the cap even if you are paid by a (for-profit) company. For example, if a large pharmaceutical

company wants to hire you, then they are subject to the cap, and not eligible to grant an H-1B visa to you. However, if the company is working on a project in conjunction with a University and the company is able to physically house you at the University to work on this collaboration, then the company can file and obtain a cap-exempt H-1B visa.

## O-1 Visa

Another option is the O-1 Visa. In order to qualify you must demonstrate "extraordinary ability" by publishing papers, presenting your work, acting as a peer reviewer, having your work cited by others, letters of recommendation, etc. These documents are collected and sent to Immigration for adjudication. There are two distinct advantages to this application: 1) there is no cap, so Immigration will not run out of O-visas; and 2) you can actually get an O-visa with-

out obtaining a waiver of the two-year home-residency requirement. However, you will have to leave the United States (usually to Canada or Mexico) to get the visa stamp in your passport prior to commencing employment in O-1 status. An attorney must review each case individually to determine if it meets all O-1 visa requirements.

Since this constitutes only a brief overview, we look forward to covering in more detail the H-1/O-1 visas as well as other pertinent immigration issues in upcoming editions of *The POSTDOCKET*.

*Adam Frank, Esq. and Brendan Delaney are at the law firm of Leavy & Frank, L.L.C. ([www.leavyfrank.com](http://www.leavyfrank.com)), which specializes in immigration law. A longtime friend of the NPA, the firm conducts Legal Seminars for International Postdocs on behalf of the NPA.*



*..runs in our family. My father and grand-father are also working as postdocs.*

# National Interest Waivers Provide a Path to Permanent Residency for Foreign-born Postdocs

Victoria Donoghue

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The prestige and opportunity for professional advancement offered by the American biomedical research enterprise draws scientists from around the world. Indeed, a recent National Science Foundation survey indicated that approximately 57% of the U.S. postdoctoral community consists of non-U.S. citizens. While all postdocs face difficult challenges transitioning from graduate student to independent researcher, foreigners who wish to research in the U.S. also face complicated immigration laws.

The experience of Dr. Latifa Boukarrou exemplifies the cumbersome immigration policies that foreign-born individuals overcome in order to gain postdoctoral positions in the U.S. Boukarrou earned her medical degree and began practicing medicine in her native country of Morocco. However, her true interest was research, and she set her sights on postdoctoral positions in the U.S.

At an international neuroscience symposium she met a professor who was conducting research on new autism therapies. The professor needed someone with a medical background who could develop the medical protocols necessary to advance his basic science work into the clinical stage and offered her the opportunity to join his lab. Boukarrou accepted and came to the U.S. under H-1B visa status in 2004.

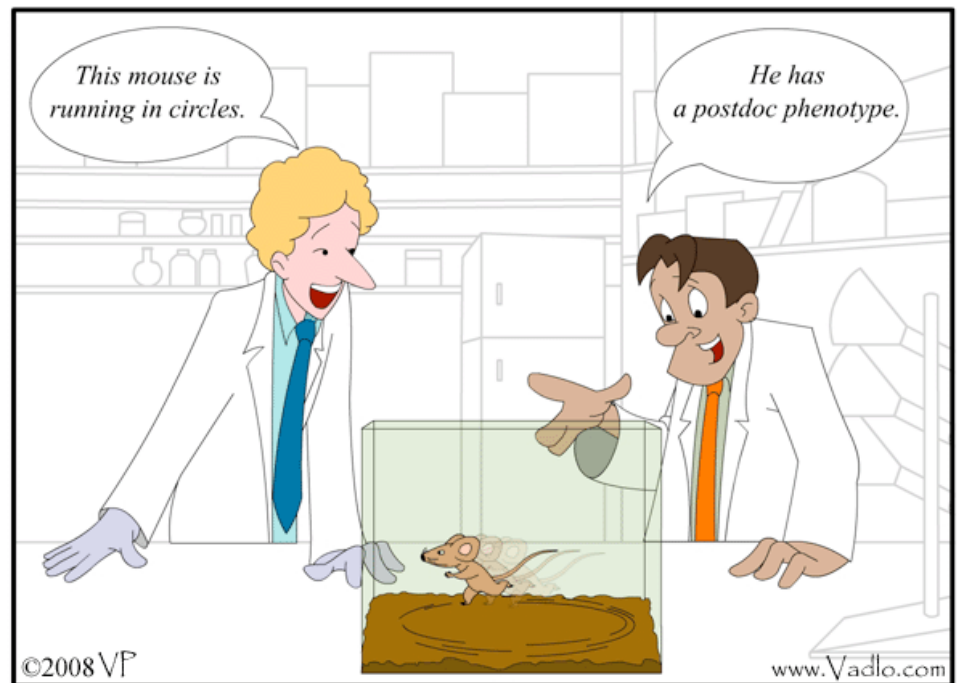
Since arriving in the U.S., the relationship between Boukarrou and her PI has been mutually beneficial. To date, they have published four research articles in scholarly journals and have given six presentations at international conferences. The professor has mentored the new scientist, encouraging her to become a licensed U.S. doctor and pursue a PhD at an American university. However, one major problem emerged: the 6 years of H-1B time would end long before Boukarrou would be able to establish herself as an independent researcher.

Getting a green card in her case would not be easy. While many foreign scientists seek green cards through the “Outstanding Researcher” category, her professional record did not meet the requirements necessary for that classification. Alternatively, the Advanced Degree Professional category was not ideal because it would require her employer to obtain a labor certification from the Department of Labor—a lengthy and expensive process. Because of this, Boukarrou had only one option: seek a National Interest Waiver (NIW).

While the requirements for an NIW are not insignificant, many foreign-born research scientists have a reasonable chance of meeting them. The NIW requires that the applicant have “some degree of influence on the field” and the research have “substantial intrinsic merit” benefits that are “national in scope.” Boukarrou’s NIW petition was granted because her research into a pharmaceutical intervention for autism was found to have intrinsic merit and was national in scope. She demonstrated her influence on the field by her publication and presentation record and had other scientists testify on behalf of her original scientific contributions.

Universities in the U.S. conduct many kinds of research that might qualify for a NIW including renewable energy sources, remote satellite sensing, and cancer, to name but a few. Foreign-born postdocs should consider using the NIW category when seeking a path to permanent U.S. residence.

*Victoria Donoghue, Esq. is Of Counsel to the law firm of Nachman & Associates ([www.visaserve.com](http://www.visaserve.com)), specializing in U.S. Immigration and Nationality Law.*





NPA Team visits the University of Toronto

## **MEMBER PERSPECTIVE:** **NPA Team Visit to University of Toronto Provides Catalyst for Positive Change**

*Trevor McKee and Minnie Kim*

Toronto houses Canada's largest concentration of scientific research, a vast cluster of hospitals and research institutes anchored by the University of Toronto (U of T). The University Health Network (UHN), comprising the research institutes affiliated with Princess Margaret, Toronto General and Toronto Western Hospitals, is Canada's largest hospital and a major teaching hospital at U of T.

Given this major research hub, it is surprising that postdocs have historically had very little organized presence in Toronto. As such, the goal of the fledgling UHN Postdoctoral Association (PDA) was to initiate a conversation amongst postdocs as to what issues were of greatest importance. Simultaneously, the UHN Center for Research Education and Training (which serves as the postdoctoral office (PDO) of UHN) was interested in initiating a broader conversation about postdoctoral training both within the organization and in the greater Toronto area. To serve both these goals, the PDA and PDO jointly hosted an NPA Team Visit in October 2007.

The Team Visit consisted of a series of meetings with the various stakeholders in the U of T and UHN administrations and included different research training centers of the major research institutes in the Toronto area. Between the roundtable discussions, a Postdoc Town Hall Meeting was also scheduled. The NPA team members were **Amber Budden**, Postdoctoral Associate at UC Santa Barbara, former Chair of the NPA's Publications Committee (now Resource Development) and a former U of T postdoc; **Jerry Hedrick**, Research Professor of Biochemistry at University of California Davis (UC Davis) and faculty advisor for the UC-Davis PDO and PDA; **Martha Skender**, Associate Director of the Department of Trainee and Alumni Affairs at MD Anderson Cancer Center and Vice Chair of the NPA Meet-

ings Committee; and **Marianne Stanford**, Postdoctoral Fellow at Ottawa Health Research Institute, and former Chair of the PDA at Robarts Research Institute.

The Team Visit was a resounding success, bringing ideas from other institutions and involving postdocs in the first open-forum discussion of their ideas and concerns. The team members provided an overview of postdoctoral training at their institutions, and offered insight into how to overcome some of the issues facing postdocs and postdoc training in Toronto. The visit concluded with the drafting of recommendations to the various stakeholders involved. The most significant development on the postdoctoral side was the formation of a PDA that represents all U of T postdocs. A steering committee ran the development of the organization until May 2008, at which time a constitution was adopted, and PDA council elections were held. Since then work has progressed on a number of initiatives, not the least of which was a comprehensive postdoctoral experience survey which received a robust 400 responses from postdocs across multiple Toronto institutions.

From the PDO side, a major accomplishment was the granting of a budget allowing expansion of postdoc programs at UHN, an important and significant symbolic step taken by the administration to further support its postdocs. More recently, a successful NPA-funded Responsible Conduct of Research grant application will see the implementation of a first-ever research integrity training program for UHN postdocs. While progress can be slow on individual postdoc timescales, a strong and vibrant PDA, coupled with a supportive PDO, provides hope for continued advancements towards positive change for postdoctoral fellows.

*Trevor McKee, PhD, is a Postdoctoral Fellow and President of the UHN and U of T PDAs, and Minnie Kim is the Program Administrator for the UHN Centre for Research Education and Training. This NPA Team Visit was part of the NPA's Postdoc Leadership Mentoring Program, generously supported by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation.*



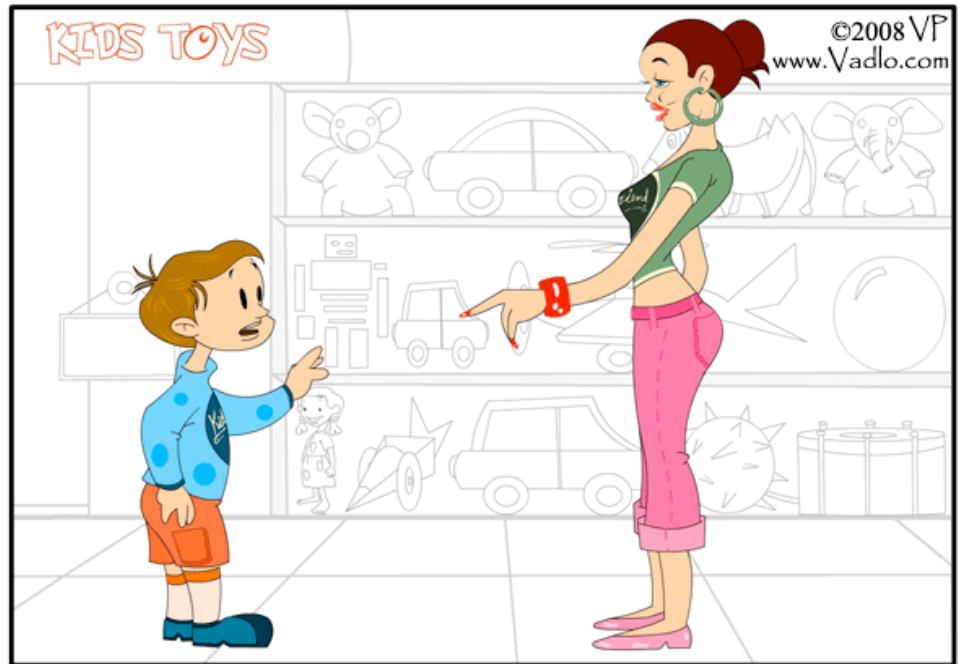
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# Postdocs Face Difficulty Identifying a Prevailing Wage

Rashada Alexander and Christine Holmes

Postdoctoral researchers are comparable in career stage to medical interns and residents; however, unlike these other professions, postdoctoral wages are not governed by a uniform set of standards. Instead, the prevailing wages for postdoctoral researchers are determined by funding limitations, employment opportunities and a host of additional factors. This creates many difficulties for evaluating postdoctoral salaries with respect to a prevailing wage.

The prevailing wage is the rate of wages, including fringe benefits, paid to a majority of workers in a geographic area for the same type of work on similar projects.



*We can't buy that, your daddy and I get postdoc salaries.*

The Department of Labor is responsible for issuing wage determinations based on occupation, project and jurisdiction.

Universities often adopt an existing wage based on the minimum wage guidelines established by the National Science Foundation or National Institutes of Health (NIH) National Research Service Awards (NRSA) stipend schedule. The NRSA minimum is a nationally respected standard, but it has been frozen since 2004 for experienced postdocs and 2006 for all postdocs. Initially intended to be updated annually, the NRSA stipend level is readily accessible to PIs or department administrators and can be found on the NIH Web site ([NIH NRSA Stipends](#)).

For foreign postdocs conducting research in the U.S., the situation is even less clear. Under current immigration laws, before an employer hires a permanent foreign worker it must prove that no U.S. worker is able, willing, qualified and available to accept the job at the prevailing wage for that occupation in the area of intended employment. An employer must demonstrate also that employment of the alien will not affect adversely the wages and working conditions of similarly employed U.S. workers. The requirement to pay prevailing wages as a minimum is often true in most employ-

ment-based visa programs involving the Department of Labor. The H-1B, H-1B1 and E-3 programs require the employer to pay, at minimum, the prevailing wage. However, in 2006, Sigma Xi published *Improving the Postdoctoral Experience: An Empirical Approach*. One of the highlights of this survey was the fact that non-U.S. citizens earn on average \$2,000 less than U.S. citizens.

Considering the increasingly scarce nature of funding, there is a great deal of resistance to raising and maintaining postdoctoral salaries to levels consistent with economic changes. In the future, changes in the NIH funding paradigm, as well as congressional appropriations and mandates, will be the main factors that shape the wage landscape for postdoctoral researchers.

The NPA continues to advocate for appropriate funding for postdoctoral salaries and recently issued a recent statement on NRSA stipend levels ([NPA Position Paper on NRSA Postdoctoral Stipends](#)).

*Rashada Alexander, PhD, is a Postdoctoral Scholar at the University of Alabama at Birmingham and a member of the NPA Resource Development and Advocacy Committees. Christine Holmes is the Director of the Postdoctoral Studies Program at Cornell University and is a member of the NPA.*

## NPA Member Round-Up

Thank you to the following sustaining members that have joined or renewed their membership since the last issue of The POSTDOCKET.

### NEW

- Idaho National Lab
- National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases
- North Carolina State University
- Penn State University
- University of Arizona
- University of California, Merced
- University of Florida
- Wayne State University, School of Medicine

### RENEWED

- New York University School of Medicine
- University at Buffalo, State University of New York
- University of California, Santa Barbara
- Washington State University

# Enhancing Diversity in Science: Collaboration is Essential

*Sibby Anderson-Thompkins*

Disparities in admission and hiring practices have contributed to fewer underrepresented minorities (African American, American Indians, and Latinos) pursuing careers in the sciences. Furthermore, a number of recent reports confirm that “the leakages in the science pipeline” have resulted in an absence of underrepresented minorities at every level—from undergraduate, graduate, postdoctoral to professoriate.

In February 2008, nine professional associations and societies held a retreat in Washington, DC, with the theme *Enhancing Diversity in Science* in order to address these ongoing concerns. Participating organizations included the Consortium of Social Science Associations, the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) Center for Careers in Science and Technology, the American Educational Research Association (AERA), the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology (FASEB), the American Psychological Association (APA), the American Sociological Association (ASA), the Society for Research in Child Development (SRCDD), the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) and the Institute for the Advancement of Social Work Research (IASWR).

Given the significant role that professional associations and societies play in providing educational and career support to their members, one goal of the retreat was to encourage collaboration between the groups. Meeting organizers stated that they “hoped the meeting would forge new opportunities for these groups to work together, learn from each other, and develop common approaches, when appropriate.”

While the meeting included panels and presentations that examined data on the obstacles and challenges for enhancing the numbers of underrepresented minorities in the sciences, it also highlighted successful diversity models and initiatives being considered by federal agencies, foundations

and institutions of higher education. Some of the recommendations that emerged from participant discussions included improving the evaluations of diversity program outcomes, providing mentoring for underrepresented minorities, developing a joint statement on diversity, and generating support for a diverse scientific workforce. However, according to the organizers, many of these suggestions require “new vehicles for effective collaboration, such as a new e-mail listserv for associations and societies to share information and one or more future workshops dedicated to a specific area for action.” Thus, building alliances and collaboration across disciplines

are strategies essential for identifying the very best practices to enhance diversity in the sciences.

Funding for the meeting came from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) with additional resources provided by the National Science Foundation (NSF). For more information on the retreat, visit the [Consortium of Social Science Associations \(COSSA\) Web site](#).

*Sibby Anderson-Thompkins is the Director of Postdoctoral Affairs at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the NPA Diversity Officer.*

## NPA MEETING ROUND-UP

The NPA continues to provide a national voice for postdoctoral scholars. Since our inception we have represented postdocs at over 275 national and regional meetings. Here is a round-up of recent and upcoming activity.

### SEPTEMBER

- University of Virginia Postdocs seminar, “A Voice for Postdocs: The National Postdoctoral Association,” Charlottesville, VA; presentation by NPA Board Chair Crystal Icenhour.
- “Getting the Most Out of a Career Fair,” sponsored by AAAS/Science and Rockville Economic Development, Inc., (REDI), Washington, D.C.

### OCTOBER

- Group on Graduate Research, Education, and Training (GREAT Group) Postdoctorate Leaders Section Meeting, Seattle, WA; Board Treasurer Judy Ho served as the official NPA representative, and Board Member Karen Peterson was also in attendance.
- Jefferson Postdoctoral Association, Thomas Jefferson University, Philadelphia, PA; presentation by Board Member (and newly elected Board Chair) Stacy Gelhaus.

- About S.T.E.M. Talent 2008: A Symposium and Career Fair for Postdocs in the Capital Region, Natcher Center at NIH, Bethesda, MD.
- University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Team Visit, Lincoln, NE; NPA Member Trevor Penning, professor with the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine, conducted the visit.
- University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences Career Day, Little Rock, AR; NPA Project Manager Kathleen Flint presented “How to Choose the Right Postdoctoral Position.”

### NOVEMBER

- Renal Week, the annual meeting of the American Society of Nephrology, Philadelphia, PA; Board Member Lisa Curtis represented the NPA.
- Annual Biomedical Research Conference for Minority Students, American Society for Microbiology, Orlando, FL; NPA Diversity Officer Sibby Anderson-Thompkins represented the NPA.

# Careering through your Postdoc, Part III

Jeffrey P. Townsend

*This is the third in a series of articles that began in the Spring 2008 issue which aim to lend perspective on the postdoctoral experience and help postdocs transition into academic jobs.*

*The postdoctoral position can be so transient and the postdoctoral experience so varied that there are few descriptions of how to be a good postdoc. However, the question is an important one and in between publishing papers might be worth some careful consideration by the legions whom, in this embarrassingly nebulous role, carry on some of the most important work on the front lines of science. To lend some perspective on the postdoctoral experience, I have encapsulated the advice I have given to finishing graduate students, new postdocs, and postdocs on the job market about what they should do as a postdoc into the answers to a few simple questions.*

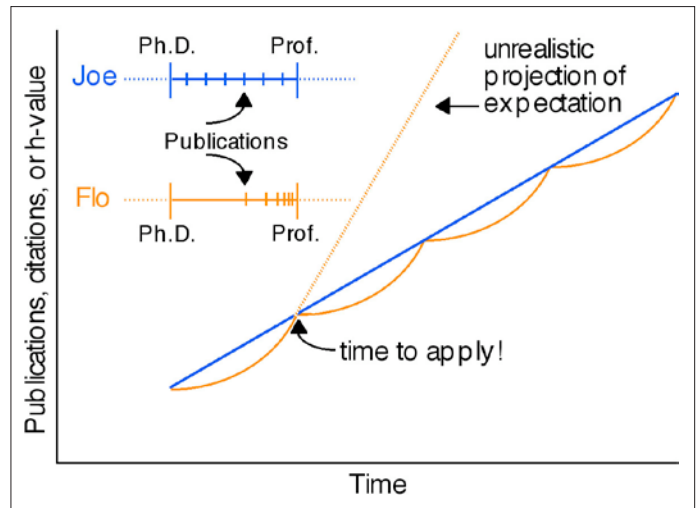
### III. How can I be the best postdoc that I can be?

Publish, publish, publish. But there is a tension that you should consider, one which closely parallels the dilemma of capital investing. Either by intent or by disposition, it is possible to adopt either a high-risk high-reward style of publication, or a low-risk smaller-reward style of publication. Consider two fictional postdocs, Joe and Flo. Joe chooses bite-size projects and submits them on a regular basis to established field journals. In con-

trast, Flo builds up a large project into a comprehensive story, and publishes perhaps somewhat fewer papers, but in high-prestige journals, right before going on the job market. Joe's strategy is less risk-averse because he can confidently tolerate a few publication failures or delays. He'll have time to revise and resubmit or even forsake some of his manuscripts. But Joe has a lower reward – to some search committee members his CV will surely appear solid, but perhaps unexceptional. Flo's strategy is high-risk. It cannot tolerate significant delays or failures in publication of key elements of her research, and provides little opportunity for refinement of approaches in response to peer review. However, it is also high-reward. Many (but not all) search committees are highly swayed by prestige publications, and most (but not all) search committees over-weight a positive second derivative of productivity in evaluating an applicant's potential as a faculty member.

In my experience, as well as that of colleagues I have cornered on the matter, search committees weight recent publications more highly than older ones, and are remarkably enthusiastic about candidates whose most recent year contains many publications. My hypothesis is that such a judgment is based on a simple and intuitive linear extrapolation that the first derivative of the candidate's productivity from the past year ( $\frac{dh}{dt}\bigg|_{-1 < t < 0}$ ) will continue into the distant future. My haphazardly sampled but thoughtfully conducted examination of the publication records of former fellow students, postdocs, colleagues and job applicants whose CVs I have had the opportunity to consider in detail refutes this linear extrapolation. Annual productivity per year during the entire postdoctoral period is a much bet-

ter predictor of junior faculty productivity than productivity in the year or even two years prior to acquisition of a faculty position, regardless of whether the number of publications or publication impact are the criteria of merit. No matter its validity as a predictor of junior faculty productivity,



the overweighting of the second derivative implies that Flo's strategy works – but only if you can time and gauge your research productivity properly.

Of course, all this also suggests a more relaxed, third approach, which is to focus purely on the science and let the publications fall where they may, and when recent productivity is high, go on the job market. Although probably a reasonable compromise, such an attitude contains its own element of risk, because postdoctoral positions feature little job stability. Moving your research projects can be difficult or impossible depending on the compatibility and research interests of serial advisors and even when possible often entails productivity costs. Changing research topics does not reset your productivity-since-PhD clock but can put you back to square one in terms of developing a research project to present in a job interview. And this brings us to the topic for our next segment: the academic job search itself.

*Jeffrey P. Townsend, PhD, is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at Yale University.*

## Volunteer for the NPA

NPA committees were just restructured! Now is a great time to join an NPA committee and help advance the interests of postdoctoral fellows and the U.S. research community. Explore the opportunities available [here](#). Contact a committee chair to become involved today!

## NEWS

### NPA Leaders Convene for Annual Committee Chairs Leadership Institute

NPA Board Members met with leadership and staff at the annual Committee Chairs Leadership Institute (CCLI) at NPA headquarters in the AAAS Building in Washington, D.C., October 25-26, 2008. This face-to-face opportunity for feedback is useful because the Board is able to communicate its goals to committees and officers, and committee chairs and officers provide feedback to the Board. Other than the CCLI, the Board Retreat, and the Annual Meeting, most NPA business is conducted by teleconferences and e-mail.

This was the first CCLI since the NPA implemented the new committee structure, combining ten committees into four committees and creating officer positions to ensure inclusion of diversity and international postdoc concerns in NPA activities. The four committees are Advocacy, Meetings, Resource Development and Outreach, with Diversity and International Officers working with all four committees and the Board. Officers, Chairs and Board Members generally agreed that the new committee structure is more streamlined, though it has taken time to iron out communications and standard procedures under the new structure.

To implement the Strategic Plan of the NPA, the Board sets annual goals and priorities and charges each committee with specific tasks. Special care was taken to ensure that pre-existing projects did not get lost in the transition this year. This task was aided by the presence of Board liaisons on each committee who facilitate communication between the Board and Committees. Committee Chairs are responsible for prioritizing committee work on the tasks that have been assigned by the Board, while also ensuring that

new ideas from the membership (that fit within the charge of each committee) are submitted to the Board for approval.  
– Rachel Rublen

### University of California Officially Recognizes UC Postdoc Union

The California Public Employment Relations Board (PERB) has verified that a majority of the approximately 5,000 postdocs working at the University of California (UC) have signed union authorization cards with the Postdoctoral Researchers Organize/United Auto Workers (PRO/UAW) union.

PERB's confirmation followed the PRO/UAW submission of approximately 4,000 cards and the filing of a petition with the labor board on June 30, 2008 for union certification. With majority status confirmed, postdocs have for the first time the right to bargain with UC over wages, working conditions, and terms of employment. The UAW currently represents more than 11,000 teaching assistants, readers and tutors on UC campuses.

PRO/UAW began organizing postdocs at the University of California in 2005. In 2006, they withdrew their petition following a massive UC reclassification of postdocs that cost them nearly 600 cards leaving them less than 100 cards short of a majority. Because authorization cards are valid for only 1 year after signing by state law, the successful 2008 petition followed an entirely new authorization drive.

The UAW represents workers at more than 40 universities and colleges nationwide including 25,000 Academic Student Employees (ASEs) – Teaching Assistants, Research Assistants, Graders, Tutors, and others – at the University of California, California State University, the University of Washington, and the University of Massachusetts. – Matthew “Oki” O’Connor

### NIH Announces New Policy on Resubmission Applications



NIH announces a change in the existing policy on resubmission (amended) applications (see [here](#)). Beginning with original new applications (i.e., never before submitted) and competing renewal applications submitted for the January 25, 2009 due dates and beyond, the NIH will accept only a single amendment to the original application. Failure to receive funding after two submissions (i.e., the original and the single amendment) will mean that the applicant should substantially re-design the project rather than simply change the application in response to previous reviews. It is expected that this policy will lead to funding high quality applications earlier, with fewer resubmissions. – AH

### NSF Requires Section on Mentoring in Grant Proposals



The American COMPETES Act of 2007 requires that all NSF grant applications that include funding for postdoctoral fellows contain a description of mentoring activities. The NPA will be seeking ways to facilitate this process in collaboration with PDOs across the country.

The policy is described in the [NSF January 2009 Grant Proposal Guide](#): “Each proposal that requests funding to support postdoctoral researchers must include, as a separate section within the 15-page Project Description, a description of the mentoring activities that will be provided for such individuals. Examples of mentoring activities include, but are not limited to: career counseling; training in preparation of grant proposals, publications and pre-

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sentations; guidance on ways to improve teaching and mentoring skills; guidance on how to effectively collaborate with researchers from diverse backgrounds and disciplinary areas; and training in responsible professional practices. The proposed mentoring activities will be evaluated as part of the merit review process under the Foundation's broader impacts merit review criterion. Proposals that do not include a separate section on mentoring activities within the Project Description will be returned without review." – AH

## NPA Partners with ResearchGATE Scientific Network



The NPA recently partnered with ResearchGATE, a new Web 2.0 online community, in an effort to provide a virtual networking platform for NPA members. ResearchGATE.net was created for scientific researchers and aims to foster collaborations and knowledge exchange among scientists worldwide. Scientists communicate with peers via personal profiles that describe technical expertise, scientific interests and projects, and conferences attended, as well as publications and other pertinent professional information. Additionally, the platform provides easy-to-use applications to facilitate novel collaborations including a semantic search engine that identifies by keyword relevant publications, research groups and/or scientists. ResearchGATE.net launched in May 2008 and is backed by a scientific advisory board that includes more than 100 professors and boasts more than 10,000 members.

The NPA has initiated a sub-community within ResearchGATE that can be found [here](#). NPA members can create working groups that directly link to the NPA sub-community. Help make the NPA network at ResearchGATE active by inviting other NPA members to join! – AH

## POLICY POINT

Lucia Mokres

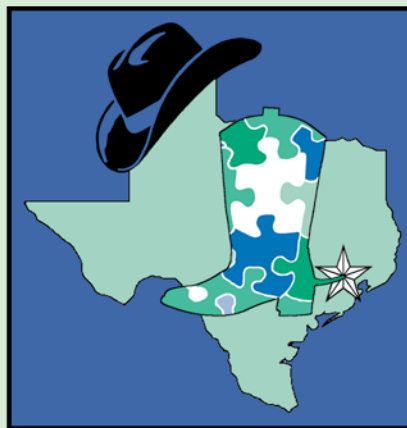
Improving the postdoctoral experience at an institutional level has long been an objective of the NPA. The Advocacy Committee has recently formed two new workgroups to support this goal. The first group is focused on promoting the adoption of the NPA Recommended Practices by all institutions. This effort will require that we first determine which institutions have already adopted all of the practices and which have not done so. In order to achieve this goal, the group is dedicating efforts towards encouraging institutions to populate the NPA/Sigma Xi Institutional Policy Database. These data are critical in determining which institutions are at the forefront of the implementation of the Recommended Practices, and which may require additional aid in developing constructive postdoctoral policies. Program Manager Kenetia Thompson will be working with us to correct some technical glitches in this database. Once they have been resolved, institutions will be strongly encouraged to update their profiles within the database. Institutions not listed will also be welcomed to add their data. Please stay tuned for further details.

The second workgroup is dedicated towards advocating for the implementation of the recommended practices in the NPA white paper entitled International Postdoctoral Researchers and Their Importance to the Advancement of U.S. Science, Technology and National Security. Much of the advocacy for this issue is focused on the government, rather than institutionally based. Because of the November elections and anticipated turnover in elected officials, the workgroup is currently conducting a needs assessment and gap analysis in advocacy efforts that have already been made; future plans for advocacy will be developed now but not implemented until new governmental leadership is in place.

Finally, the Advocacy Committee would like to welcome Cathee Johnson-Phillips as the new Executive Director (ED) of the NPA. Due to the nature of the work that the Advocacy Committee is assigned, the ED acts as the face of the committee at many levels, in particular for national organizations such as the National Institutes of Health, and the National Science Foundation, and with members of Congress. We are excited to have Cathee on board and look toward a productive close to 2008.

*Lucia Mokres, DVM, is Chair of the NPA Advocacy Committee.*

## 2009 Annual Meeting of the NPA



National Postdoctoral Association  
Seventh Annual Meeting  
March 27 - 29, 2009; Houston, TX

The 7th Annual Meeting of the NPA will be held at the MD Anderson Cancer Center Conference Facility in Houston, Texas from March 27-29, 2009. This year's hosts include: M.D. Anderson Cancer Center, UT Health Science Center at Houston and Baylor College of Medicine. The Annual Meeting is a highly engaging and productive conference for postdoctoral scholars, administrators and other individuals working to enhance the postdoctoral experience. We are excited to announce that the keynote speaker will be professor, author and Nobel Laureate Dr. Peter Doherty. Calls for workshop and poster abstracts will be forthcoming.

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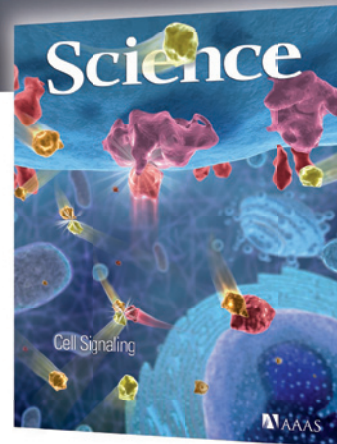
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