



# The POSTDOCKet

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## Career Planning Expert, Peter Fiske, Addresses Postdocs at NPA Annual Meeting

*Fabian V. Filipp*

In a packed auditorium of The University of Texas M. D. Anderson Cancer Center, scientist and author Peter Fiske, PhD, addressed a large audience of post-doctoral scholars regarding their career planning and job-hunting process. With the dire state of the world economy, savvy career planning for postdocs is now more important than ever.



Peter Fiske, PhD, encourages NPA members to find the perfect career path through objective self-assessment and pro-active professional networking.

Many PhDs question the traditional career trajectory set for them by their programs. According to the NSF's *Science and Engineering Indicators 2008*, the

number of doctorate holders with postdoc positions have increased while the number of doctorate holders entering full time faculty

**Fiske, continued on page 2**

## MEMBER PERSPECTIVE

### Recap of the 2009 Annual Meeting of the NPA

*Rachel L. Rublen*

The 2009 NPA Annual Meeting was held in Houston, Texas, and hosted by Baylor College of Medicine, Rice University, The University of Houston, and The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston, The University of Texas M. D. Anderson Cancer Center, and The University of Texas Medical Branch at Galves-

ton. At the meeting, plenary speaker Peter Fiske, PhD, encouraged postdocs to think creatively and find a career that fits not just our skills, but our personalities and ideals as well. No career direction a postdoc takes is "bad", whether it is head of your own research lab, a career in science policy, or rodeo star. A workshop on identifying transferable skills and the plenary session



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

on Individual Development Plans reinforced this theme and highlighted the need to keep our minds open as we plan our careers. Nobel Laureate Peter Doherty reiterated the surprising directions our careers can take us as we discover where our talents and interests lie. While we may not ultimately end up

**Recap, continued on page 8**

# New Redesigned NPA Web Site Launched

*Kenetia Thompson*

The NPA is pleased to announce the launch of its newly redesigned Web site at <http://www.nationalpostdoc.org>. Over the past several months, the site has received a major overhaul that ranges from its platform to overall appearance. The intent of these efforts was to better meet the needs of all users—from NPA members to the general public—by providing a more user-friendly interface. The redesigned Web site continues to provide the same high quality information and resources NPA users expect, while adding new features:

- **New & Improved Members Area.** With the new site, members can easily update contact information and access membership details. In addition, they can connect to other members through a searchable

member directory, forums (to come), and committee groups.

- **Postdoc Community & Special Interest Portals.** These portals are special areas that contain information and resources based on professional interests or specific topics. This feature will be especially useful to visitors and new members: instead of having to search the entire site, they can select a portal and are provided with specific information based on their particular interest(s).
- **Briefing Room.** The Briefing Room presents in-depth analyses of emerging issues affecting the postdoctoral community. In addition, it will provide updated information on how the NPA is addressing those issues.

The redesign of the NPA Web site was a large collaborative effort. To assist with this labor-intensive process, the NPA hired GetUWired, a web development



and hosting company. In addition, many member volunteers formed the NPA Web site Taskforce, and the Resource Development Committee helped with the completion of the project by providing guidance, time, and support. The NPA would like to extend a special thank you to these members.

Please take a moment to visit the redesigned [NPA site](http://www.nationalpostdoc.org).

*Kenetia Thompson is a Program Manager at the NPA.*

**Fiske**, *continued from page 1*

positions has fallen from 74% to 38% over the past three decades. Many now recognize that most advanced degree scientists possess an arsenal of highly marketable, transferable skills that qualifies them for any number of career paths both in and beyond academia.

When postdoctoral appointments began at Johns Hopkins University about a century ago, they were intended to function as a short period of transition between graduate school and "academy." Today, mostly due to economic forces, the postdoctoral years have evolved and expanded to become a reservoir accommodating the surge in PhD production and the dearth of PhD jobs.

Doctorate-trained scholars possess many of the traits and skills that are of highest value in any workplace. Among these ignored transferable qualities are the skills for critical evaluation, problem-solving, initiating projects with unknown outcomes, complex organization, public speaking, and integrating disparate information into unified concepts as well as the simple art of make others feel interesting.

More than ever PhD scientists wonder about the true breadth of career opportunities. Pursuing these options often requires a certain amount of risk. Fiske warned, "One thing I am concerned about is that graduate students and postdocs are steeped into what can sometimes be a very conservative intellectual culture, where risk-taking is considered dangerous and frowned upon. The biggest opportunities for myself have come when I have found the courage or foolishness to take a risk."

Fiske divides the job search into four phases: 1. Self-assessment—know your interests, skills, and values; 2. Exploration—scan your options and discover career directions; 3. Focusing—find your fit; 4. Application—develop an action plan including résumés, networking and interviews. PhDs tend to skip the first steps. Many people start by scanning job advertisements and then directly move to a job search in a very specific environment. What can research institutions do to support their postdoctoral scholars? "The best schools have a dedicated career counseling center including advisors specifically focused on the needs of postdocs,"

said Fiske. He refers to the 2005 Sigma Xi Postdoc Survey "Doctors without Orders" that states, "The more resources that are in place for the postdoc, the better the outcome [...] in terms of publications."

Fiske's talk focused on the importance of professional networking. He explained, "Anyone's career options, be they for an academic career, an industry career, or for a career in public policy, critically depend on the professional network they develop." Effective networking is nothing more than building relationships with people who share your personal and professional interests and keeping in touch. The National Postdoctoral Association is the perfect example of effective professional networking. The scholars who meet each other and connect in those early stages of their career will stay in touch—as colleagues, competitors, peers, and friends.

*Fabian V. Filipp, PhD, is an EMBO Fellow at the University of California, San Diego and current President of the University of California Council of Postdoctoral Scholars, a volunteer umbrella organization that oversees more than 6000 California postdocs.*

# Kauffman Foundation and NPA Jointly Launch New Entrepreneurial Excellence Award for Postdoctoral Scholars

*Cathee Johnson Philips*

Postdocs who take the entrepreneurial steps to get their research to market bring enormous potential benefits to society and the economy. To recognize and encourage postdoc entrepreneurial excellence, the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation and the National Postdoctoral Association (NPA) have launched the **Kauffman Foundation Outstanding Postdoctoral Entrepreneur Award**. The award was announced at the 7th Annual Meeting of the NPA in March.

The award, a \$10,000 honorarium, recognizes excellence in entrepreneurial performance in the scientific community. The recipient must have completed a postdoc in the United States. A second award, the Emerging Postdoctoral Entrepreneur Award, a \$2,500 honorarium, will be given to a promising postdoctoral entrepreneur.

“Role models and their stories are powerful tools to increase awareness of entrepreneurship among the postdoctoral research community,” said Sandy Miller, Kauffman Foundation senior fellow and director of the Kauffman Entrepreneur Postdoctoral Fellowship program. “Postdocs are at the

forefront of pioneering research that will improve our lives and society in countless ways. We want to applaud their efforts to get their research to market.”

To apply for the awards, an individual must hold a PhD and have been a postdoctoral scholar in the United States. Specific eligibility criteria for each award and application information will be released in June 2009. The deadline for submission is tentatively set for November 1, 2009. The inaugural awards will be presented at the 8th Annual Meeting of the NPA, slated for March 12-14, 2010, in Philadelphia, PA.

The award is part of the Kauffman Foundation’s ongoing effort to harness the entrepreneurial potential of postdoctoral researchers and scientists across the United States. In February, the Kauffman Foundation launched the Entrepreneur Postdoctoral Fellowship. Through this program, the Foundation will select 12 top-tier postdoctoral researchers with entrepreneurial aspirations. The Postdoctoral Fellowship participants will learn the entrepreneurial skills necessary to move their innovations from the lab to the market and potentially

establish the high-growth technology companies of tomorrow. To learn more about the program, click [here](#).

“Through this award and our Fellowship program, the Kauffman Foundation is committing significant resources to aid in unleashing the enormous potential of the postdoc community through entrepreneurship and education,” Miller said. “By helping postdocs learn how to commercialize their research, we further the Foundation’s mission to grow the economy and expand human welfare.”

## About the Kauffman Foundation

The Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation is a private nonpartisan foundation that works to harness the power of entrepreneurship and innovation to grow economies and improve human welfare. Through its research and other initiatives, the Kauffman Foundation aims to open young people’s eyes to the possibility of entrepreneurship, promote entrepreneurship education, raise awareness of entrepreneurship-friendly policies, and find alternative pathways for the commercialization of new knowledge and technologies. It also works to prepare students to be innovators, entrepreneurs and skilled workers in the 21st century economy through initiatives designed to improve learning in math, engineering, science and technology. Founded by late entrepreneur and philanthropist Ewing Marion Kauffman, the Foundation is based in Kansas City, MO, and has approximately \$2 billion in assets.

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

## New Member Benefit: Invest in Yourself with Personal Coaching

The NPA is always looking to add new services that can benefit our members. One request we’ve had frequently is to provide personal or career counseling and/or mentoring. We have been lucky enough to secure a partnership with youPlus Coaching Inc. As a special arrangement for NPA Coaching, youPlus has agreed to offer a person’s first two months of coaching, a total of six sessions, at a significantly reduced price. [Click here](#) for more information.

# Minimizing Female Postdoc Attrition through Adoption of Family-Friendly Policies

Diana A. Stavreva,  
Cecilia Canedo-Martinez, and  
Elisabeth D. Martinez

Although women comprise over 45% of postdoctoral fellows in the biomedical sciences, they hold fewer than 20% of biomedical academic appointments. A recent survey of more than 1,200 postdoctoral fellows conducted by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) revealed that women postdoctoral fellows see their career options quite differently than men (see EMBO Reports 8(11): 977-81). Female postdocs are less likely than their male counterparts to consider staying in academic science or pursuing a Principal Investigator (PI) position. Although women generally report similar levels of professional training and skills as men, they feel less confident about attaining independent positions or getting tenure. Women postdocs indicated that the main obstacle to pursuing the PI track was concern about its incompatibility with possible family obligations: spending time

with their children and other family members, having more children in the future, and limiting their job searches to the geographical location of their spouse's job. Women also reported having less technical help than men during their postdoctoral years, and fewer women had a scientific project that they could take with them to

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*Establishing job-sharing and part-time positions for tenure-track investigators as well as appropriate funding mechanisms that would facilitate these arrangements could change the work culture and motivate female postdocs to stay on the academic track.*

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develop independently, factors that could indirectly affect their ability to seek a PI position.

What can alleviate these problems and minimize female postdoc attrition?

Women indicated that establishing effective family-friendly policies throughout the various stages of the scientific path would greatly benefit their career choices; for example, the availability of affordable child-care during graduate school and beyond, as well as flexible or part-time hours during the postdoc years. Establishing job-sharing and part-time positions for tenure-track investigators as well as appropriate funding mechanisms that would facilitate these arrangements could change the work culture and motivate female postdocs to stay on the academic track. Other solutions could also be applied to facilitate job-related travel, transitional positions, re-entry after personal leave, and research track switching mid-career, etc. Institutions that want to remain competitive and attract talent will need to establish or expand their family-friendly policies.

Who is leading the way? Some research universities have started the arduous task of changing the scientific culture. Princeton University, for example, has established several programs (see: *The Daily Princetonian* issue of 4/16/09): primary care givers are granted course relief for the first year of their child's life, tenure clocks are extended by one year for any assistant professor who has (or whose spouse/partner has a child), funds are provided by the institution to cover child-care during professional meetings, departments are given incentives to hire competent women and minorities, and the university has an effective "preceptor" system for incoming assistant professors to receive additional mentoring. Improved policies like these will not only benefit women postdocs and their families, but the scientific world that they serve.

*Diana A. Stavreva, PhD, is a Research Fellow at the National Cancer Institute (NIH); Cecilia Canedo-Martinez, MA, is a Freelance Editor based in Denver, Colorado with an interest in women in academia; and Elisabeth D. Martinez, PhD, is an Instructor within the Department of Pharmacology at UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas.*

## Family-friendly policy basic checklist

- Available childcare for graduate students, postdocs, junior faculty
- Flexible/part time/job sharing work arrangements for scientists
- Transitional positions between postdoc and PI
- Re-entry paths
- Course relief for new parents
- Tenure clock extensions
- Institutional funds for child care at conferences
- Effective mentoring programs
- Harassment-free use of family friendly policies

# New NPA Member Benefit: NPA Partners with YouPlus, Inc. to Offer Professional Coaching Services for Postdocs

L. David Finger

In an ideal world, each postdoc would have a perfect mentor that would encourage him/her to achieve his/her professional aspirations. However, many postdocs do not receive adequate mentoring, and must make critical career and life decisions with little encouragement or support. The NPA works diligently to increase awareness for the importance of mentoring and establishing uniform mentoring standards at the national and institutional level. Recently, the NPA partnered with youPlus, Inc. in order to help postdocs who lack effective mentoring or require objective professional guidance. YouPlus, Inc. will provide a personal coach to NPA members at significant savings.

Although the idea of coaching usually invokes images of team sports, corporations have paired coaches with corporate executives to create high performing employees. In addition to corporate executives, individuals seeking to improve their lives—through stress reduction, achieving work-life balance, pursuing business endeavors, or building relationships—can also use a coach from youPlus to achieve their goals. According



to the [company Web site](#), youPlus seeks to unlock the “limitless potential of an individual in his or her career or life goals” by helping one set goals, ask poignant questions, and provide encouragement. As an analogy, youPlus coaches act in a manner similar to personal trainers that help a client achieve fitness goals. Jonathan Troen, Marketing Director of youPlus, Inc., is well aware of the many transitions that postdocs must endure during their career and the desire of many postdocs to “start creating their own future, instead of building someone else’s.” In addition, youPlus seeks to reconnect postdocs with “what brought them into the postdoctoral world in the first place.” Troen said, “Many take whatever opportunity is in front of them, as opposed to finding or creating the opportunity that will thrill them.” In this way, coaching has a major impact: youPlus coaches will reconnect postdocs with what is important to them, and then will hold the individual accountable so that he/she will take the proper steps to achieve their individual goals.

According to NPA Executive Director, Cathee Johnson Phillips, the idea of part-

nering with youPlus, Inc. originated after Crystal Icenhour, former Chair of the NPA Board of Directors, attended a youPlus seminar. After Icenhour left the Board, Ms. Johnson Phillips cultivated the relationship with youPlus, Inc. which led to an official partnership. Ms. Johnson Phillips says her motivation for fostering this relationship was, “to provide an avenue for postdocs to consider all of their career options, given the probability that only 12 to 20 percent of postdoctoral scholars will actually make it into tenure-track faculty positions.”

Standard monthly rates for youPlus coaching are \$450 and include two sessions, but individual and affiliate members of the NPA will receive a two-month introductory rate of \$167 per month that includes two additional free sessions (for a total of six sessions within the two-month introductory period). After the introductory period expires, NPA members will receive a 20% monthly discount.

*L. David Finger, PhD is a Postdoctoral Fellow at the City of Hope Beckman Research Institute and serves as Chair of the NPA Meetings Committee.*

## NPA to Foster Postdoc-to-Faculty Transition for Women Scientists

Kathleen Flint Ehm

The NPA has embarked on a new project to assist women postdocs in making the transition to the professoriate called NPA ADVANCE: *From Postdoc to Faculty: Transition Issues for Women Scientists*. NPA ADVANCE is supported by a \$520,745 three-year grant from the National Science Foundation’s (NSF) ADVANCE program for ‘advancing’ the representation of women in academic careers. As a “Partnerships for Adaptation, Implementation, and Dissemination” or PAID-type proj-

ect, NPA ADVANCE will focus on adapting and disseminating promising institutional practices that can help women postdocs successfully transition to faculty careers.

The NPA will draw on successful models from both past ADVANCE awardees as well as the postdoctoral community in order to develop guidance and resources enhancing postdoctoral training at institutions directly supporting postdocs. These resources will be disseminated through various avenues:



- **National Summit on Gender and the Postdoctorate:** a national forum for discussing and promoting promising practices, which will include a travel grant competition to encourage postdoc attendance;

- **NPA Annual Meeting workshops** that will include presentations and discussion on recommended models and practices;
- **New resource handbook:** a compendium resource handbook of models and recommended practices for helping women make a successful transition from postdoc to faculty; and,
- **Online informational clearinghouse:** a centralized source for recommended practices, including the resource handbook.

The ADVANCE program at the NSF has supported efforts to foster female participation in the academic workforce since 2001. A majority of its supported activities have focused on enhancing policies and practices for how the institution

*ADVANCE, continued on page 6*

ADVANCE, continued from page 5  
may better recruit and retain its women faculty. NPA ADVANCE will focus on approaches for better preparing those who will be recruited, namely, postdocs.

Despite the fact that a majority of postdocs identify the tenure-track faculty position as their primary career goal, only a fraction ultimately will obtain such positions. Women in particular face additional challenges, such as balancing the needs of work and family and subtle forms of discrimination. Enhancing policies and practices during postdoctoral training can better prepare postdocs for becoming faculty as well as mitigate the quality of life issues that can be critical for retaining these individuals in the academic workforce.

Watch for more information as the ADVANCE project develops on the [NPA Web site](#). NPA ADVANCE is supported by the National Science Foundation (Grant No. #0819994).

*Kathleen Flint Ehm, PhD, is Project Manager for the NPA where she manages the NPA ADVANCE Project.*

## Become a Leader at the NPA

The NPA is currently seeking strong, dedicated leaders to serve as International Officers. These positions provide great opportunities to develop or hone leadership skills, expand professional networks, advance the mission of the NPA, and work with a wonderful group of colleagues from across the United States. Most business is accomplished via teleconference, e-mail, and long-distance communications. No experience is needed. Postdocs and administrators are strongly encouraged to consider service in these positions. If you know someone who may be interested in these positions, please contact an NPA representative.

## NPA Launches Inaugural Development Effort: “Raising Our Voice” Campaign Marks New Phase in NPA Growth

*Daniel A. Gorelick*

The NPA unveiled its inaugural campaign to increase membership and strengthen its network of expert advisors and financial supporters. Announced in March 2009 at the 7th Annual Meeting of the NPA in Houston, Texas, the “Raising Our Voice” campaign intends to raise \$250,000 within three years and to begin an endowment fund to serve on-going policy efforts that target the postdoctoral community.

The “Raising Our Voice” campaign has three goals:

- Increase awareness of postdoctoral issues
- Increase NPA membership and participation in NPA activities
- Ensure the long-term financial security of the NPA.

To date, nearly 7% of the campaign’s financial goal has been reached. The NPA has a tremendous record of accomplishment, including persuading both the NIH and NSF to adopt a definition for “postdoctoral scholar,” but the NPA must build a strong foundation of financial support in order to prepare for long-term advocacy and service to future postdoctoral scholars and administrators.

Since its inception in 2003, the NPA has relied almost entirely on support from the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) and the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation. The NPA represents more than 40,000 postdocs—173 institutions pay dues so that their postdocs receive free affiliate membership in the NPA. Nearly 600 members support the NPA through individual contributions of \$35 or more; these full members are eligible to vote in elections and serve on the Board of Directors.

Membership dues provide only 25% of our annual operating budget. The remaining 75% must come from sponsorships, grants and gifts. Annual dues of \$35 are a small price to pay for a national voice for postdocs—a voice that has the ear of federal agencies like the NIH and the NSF, who have approached us for recommendations on how to better serve the postdoctoral community, and a national voice that has helped convince Congress to require mentoring plans for NSF grant applications and that provides helpful guidelines for both local postdoc organizations and international postdocs. All of the members of the Board of Directors have donated money to the NPA above and beyond their individual membership dues.

What can you do to help? Join an NPA committee and help plan the Annual Meeting, address policy issues that affect postdocs, or provide content for the NPA Web site and national *POSTDOCKET* newsletter (for archived issues, please click [here](#)). You can become a full member of the NPA or make a tax-deductible contribution in addition to your membership dues. Most postdocs are high on talent but low on money, which is why your network of contacts is invaluable. You might have a friend, colleague, advisor or mentor who is in a position to help the NPA. Tell them about the NPA’s mission, and introduce them to a member of the Board of Directors. The NPA has become the national voice for postdoctoral scholars, but only through your help will we continue to speak.

*Daniel A. Gorelick, PhD, is a member of the NPA Board of Directors and Chair of the ‘Raising Our Voice’ campaign. He is an AAAS Science & Technology Policy Fellow at the U.S. Department of State and can be contacted at [daniel.gorelick@gmail.com](mailto:daniel.gorelick@gmail.com).*

# NPA and the 2009 American Reinvestment and Recovery Act

Stacy L. Gelhaus

On February 17, 2009, President Barack Obama signed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) into law. This Act was designed to stimulate our struggling economy and to save and create millions of jobs, but how does this short-term stimulus benefit postdoctoral scholars? Since the federal government funds 70% of postdocs, we often look to the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and National Science Foundation (NSF) for forecasts of the economic climate for postdocs (click [here](#) for more information).



divided approximately two-thirds of its allotted \$800 million among four competitions: \$200 million for the RC1 Challenge Grants, another \$200 million for RC2 Grand Opportunities (GO) Grants of at least \$1 million each, \$100 million for new faculty hiring at core academic facilities, and \$21 million for summer research experiences for students and teachers.

But how does the ARRA funding increase benefit postdocs? The NIH issued NOT-OD-09-056, which allows for additional administrative funding to active NIH Research Grants and Research Program and Center Grants (P) as well as Career Development Awards (K), Institutional Training Grants (T), Cooperative Agreements (U) and Educational Development Awards. This benefits postdocs by increasing funding and resources for positions such as the K99/R00 mechanism, offering employment for new post-

docs and extending support for senior postdocs. While no funds have been allotted specifically to increase the number of F or K awards, postdocs will benefit through increased funding on current grants that permit the creation of new postdoc positions and funding for over one hundred new faculty positions.

Probably the best indication that NIH is concerned about the declining postdoc-to-faculty transition rate is the \$100 million allotted to new faculty. This program will fund approximately 117 new faculty positions across the United States. ARRA funding will be used to support the hiring of new faculty that will develop research projects within the context of Biomedical Core Centers. These new faculty will be responsible for creating jobs within their core centers. Although less than 1% of the stimulus funds have been allotted to this program, this responsibility is an indication that NIH is aware that after two years, these faculty positions must be sustained.

The NPA is involved in addressing the current and evolving needs of postdocs

during this difficult economic climate. After the ARRA was announced, the NPA applauded the Obama Administration for its recognition of a needed increase in scientific funding. Including the scientific enterprise within the stimulus package allocations is a move in the right direction, and we hope to see sustained funding in future budgets from federal granting agencies. The NPA was invited by the National Institute of General Medical Sciences (NIGMS) to provide input regarding how NIGMS's funding should be allocated. In addition to NIGMS, the NPA has submitted letters to other NIH institutes and centers regarding the allocation of ARRA funding. All of the NPA's responses to the ARRA can be viewed on the [NPA Web site](#). The NPA will continue to respond to the ARRA and any other legislation that may impact postdocs. It is through the establishment of relationships with Congress, granting agencies and other professional societies that we influence both the direction of science and the future for postdocs.

*Stacy L. Gelhaus, PhD is a Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Pennsylvania and current Chair of the NPA Board of Directors.*

## Plan for Your Retirement with NPA Member Benefit

Are you planning for your retirement? Being an NPA member can help. The NPA, in partnership with MetLife, is now offering NPA members an opportunity to participate in a deferred annuity program, the MetLife Personal Pension Builder<sup>SM</sup>. NPA would like to recognize [Garnett-Powers & Associates, Inc.](#) for their assistance, making it possible for us to offer this benefit to our members. Garnett-Powers is a longtime friend of the NPA. For more information, please [click here](#).

## POLICY POINT

*Kathleen Flint Ehm*

The National Science Foundation's (NSF) implementation of new mentoring and ethics training requirements this year has cast the spotlight on postdocs at U.S. research institutions.

As directed by the 2007 America COMPETES Act, NSF will require, for all proposals that include support for postdocs, the following: (1) a postdoctoral researcher mentoring plan, submitted with the proposal; and (2) a plan for providing responsible conduct of research (RCR) training for all supported postdocs, subject to review upon request. The mentoring plan requirement is now in effect for all proposals submitted after January 5, 2009, and the RCR requirement (a draft implementation plan was posted for comment in the *Federal Register* on February

26, 2009) will become effective October 1, 2009. As a result, institutions have begun to marshal their resources to help satisfy these new guidelines.

While some institutions already have programs in place to help Principal Investigators (PIs) meet these requirements, others have begun to establish new programs and services for postdocs. To help the postdoctoral community respond to these needs, the NPA has developed valuable resources to facilitate the implementation of the requirements. These include:



NATIONAL  
POSTDOCTORAL  
ASSOCIATION

### Mentoring Plan Guide:

The NPA has posted guidance on the development of mentoring plans for postdocs on its Web site [here](#). It features a "How To" guide for drafting a mentoring plan with recommendations on the core components that can maximize the research and career development of postdocs. The guide

includes a menu of potential mentoring activities that can be drawn from a variety of sources within the research group, at the institution as well as external to the institution. It also contains an annotated list of resources on mentoring.

**RCR Toolkit:** The NPA has also developed an extensive RCR toolkit with guidance and resources for developing RCR training programs for postdocs. It includes guidance on tailoring program content and format to postdocs, links to model programs, a guide to specific RCR issues of concern for postdocs, tips on successfully marketing RCR programs to postdocs, and an extensive, annotated reference list. The NPA's [RCR portal](#), also features project descriptions for a variety of types of RCR programs and presentations from past workshops on developing RCR programs for postdocs.

*Kathleen Flint Ehm, PhD, is Project Manager for the NPA where she manages the NPA ADVANCE Project.*

### Recap, continued from page 1

where we planned to be, the process of planning will help us find out where we want to be.

I experienced a startling revelation along these lines this weekend. My family wants to stay in Columbia, Missouri, a small town dominated by a state university at which I do not see myself. I realized that my options are broader than simply to be employed at this university or move to another city. I will not be head of my own lab, nor will I be a rodeo star, but I am confident I can find my niche on a less traditional path.

"Faculty are not the enemy. Well, not all of them." That is the motto one group adopted during the PDA Leadership meeting on Friday. How can we get faculty on board with our non-traditional career aspirations? During the Townhall Meeting on Sunday, suggestions included teaching postdocs that their faculty mentors are more sympathetic than many of us believe, bringing in faculty for panel

discussions, awarding local and national mentoring awards, and waiting for the next generation of faculty who may be former NPA members.

Our struggling economy will have an impact on postdocs. To save budgets, some institutions are reducing the number of postdoc stipends. PDAs anticipate budget cuts next year. It is a credit to the NPA that more than 250 participants attended the Annual Meeting despite economic hardships.

The energy and number of volunteer hours put in by the Meetings Committee, while still completing their own research, is difficult to believe. This year's meeting included both postdoctoral associations and postdoctoral offices as well as workshops, plenary sessions, guest speakers, panel discussions, a poster session and a down home Texas barbecue. Postdocs have such strong loyalty to the NPA that many continue to attend the Annual Meeting and even stay involved for many years after their postdoctoral experience ends. Importantly, the Annual Meeting

has helped me build long-lasting friendships that I know will last through my entire career. I look forward to the 2010 Annual Meeting in Philadelphia with great anticipation!

*Rachel Rublen, PhD, is a Postdoctoral Researcher at the University of Missouri and Chair of the NPA Resource Development Committee.*



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[www.cafepress.com/thenpastore](http://www.cafepress.com/thenpastore)

# Publicly Sharing Postdoc Survey Data Requires Institutional Review Board Approval

*Ann M. Peiffer*

At the NPA Annual Meeting, the benefits of sharing postdoc association (PDA) survey results were discussed; however, during these conversations it became clear that many participants were unaware of the importance of Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval when sharing postdoc survey data. If public sharing of survey data is to occur (i.e., within a presentation at a meeting, posted on an external Web site, forwarded to another PDA, or placed within a grant application), each PDA is ethically responsible to apply for exemption from federal requirements for the protection of human research subjects. Individual researchers cannot determine their own exemption, but an IRB is authorized through the Department of Health and Human Services Regulations [45 CFR 46.101(b)]. PDA surveys that assess postdoc needs or curriculum desires would be exempt under Category 1, which refers to common educational settings. Since most surveys do not collect personal identity information that could be used to identify respondents (e.g., name, social security number, etc.), anonymity is ensured. This strengthens the case for exemption status and typically waives the need for Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) authorization.

For those unfamiliar with the IRB process, you will usually need to identify the study personnel and submit a study protocol, the intended survey, and any advertisement material used to contact survey respondents. When you identify the study personnel, be cognizant of your institution's rules for researchers working with human subjects. For example, Wake Forest University School of Medicine (WFUSM) requires researchers to maintain a current Human Subjects Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) certification. Anyone involved in administering the study or processing data should comply with institutional human subject training requirements.

A study protocol contains a brief description of the study, why it is needed, and how and from whom information will be collected. In addition, a description of a subject's risk and benefit is given. Benefits could include monetary compensation, chance at a raffle prize, or no direct benefit except the opportunity to tailor a curriculum they will have access to in the future. In most anonymous surveys, the risk involves loss of confidentiality when responses are linked to individual participants. Since this is a risk, the protocol provides some procedure to minimize it. A standard protocol used at WFUSM states, "We will use an e-mail circulated survey that can be filled in electronically via Survey Monkey. No HIPAA identifiers will be collected as part of the survey. Only information in aggregated form will be published or available." You also need to designate a study staff member to report

any adverse events, problems, deviations, or protocol changes to the IRB.

Lastly, it is important to obtain consent from study subjects prior to their completion of the survey. WFUSM includes a statement on material sent with a link to the survey that states, "Completing the survey indicates your willingness to participate in the research study." In this way, WFUSM ensures that subjects have consented to a research project, yet we do not have a consent form that contains their name.

We have posted examples of these forms on the [NPA Web site](#) for you to review and utilize at your home institution.

*Ann M. Peiffer, PhD, is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at Wake Forest University School of Medicine and an Adjunct Assistant Professor at Wake Forest University.*

## 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.

### MARCH

- National Institute for Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) Career Planning and Networking Workshop for NICHD (NIH) grantees; Linthicum Heights, Md.; presentation by Jennifer Pohlhaus, Ph.D., Vice Chair of the NPA Board of Directors.

### APRIL

- University of Nebraska-Lincoln Research Fair; Lincoln, Neb.; "What Every Postdoctoral Scholar and Principal Investigator Should Know: The National Postdoctoral Association Core Competencies"; by Cathee Johnson Phillips, Executive Director, NPA.
- American Society for Nutrition (ASN) Scientific Sessions at Experimental Biology 2009; New Orleans, La., Postdoctoral and Young Investigator Networking Brunch; general presentation on the NPA and postdoctoral issues by Johnson-Phillips.

### MAY

- American Association of Immunologists Annual Meeting; Seattle, Wash.; "The Secrets to a Successful Postdoctoral Experience"; Karen Peterson, Ph.D., Member, NPA Advisory Board and Past NPA Board Member.
- Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences, National Naval Medical Center, Bethesda, Md.; presentation on the NPA and the value of postdoctoral associations (PDAs) by Lori Conlan, Ph.D., member of the NPA Board of Directors.

### JUNE

- National Science Foundation (NSF) Division of Human Resource Development (HRD) 2009 Joint Annual Meeting (JAM); Washington, D.C.; professional development session on Mentoring Plans for Postdoctoral Associates; by Johnson-Phillips.

# PRO/UAW Bargaining with the University of California Proceeds

Steven W. Culman

Bargaining between the Postdoctoral Researchers Organize/United Auto Workers (PRO/UAW) union and the University of California (UC) has continued over the past several months. The two parties agreed to meet on 22 set dates between March and June 26th to discuss relevant issues. PRO/UAW has supplied the University with proposals on nearly all non-economic bargaining topics (e.g. workload, health and safety, intellectual property rights, and mentoring). The Union will also be making proposals on economic topics such as pay and benefits, which draw on thousands of bargaining surveys filled out by UC Postdocs over the last few years, according to PRO/UAW bargaining team member Matthew “Okie” O’Connor.

UC postdoctoral researchers voted in March with a 92% majority to authorize the PRO/UAW to call a strike if circumstances warrant it and if the bargaining team deems it necessary. According to the UAW Constitution, there must be at least a two-thirds majority vote by the membership to give the bargaining team authority to call a strike.

PRO/UAW was recognized by the UC as the exclusive bargaining representative of Postdoctoral Scholars at all 10 of the University of California campuses last November, after the state labor board verified that a majority of the roughly 5,800 Postdocs had signed PRO/UAW authorization cards.

The NPA is a professional association of postdoctoral scholars and administrators. The NPA does not engage in collective bargaining or conflict resolu-

tion between employers and employees. The NPA works at the national level to promote positive change for postdoctoral scholars in the United States and maintains a neutral position on postdoc unionization. For more information on the latest issues affecting the post-

doctoral community, including postdoc unionization, please visit the [NPA briefing room](#).

*Steven W. Culman, PhD, is a Postdoctoral Scholar at the University of California, Davis and NPA affiliate member.*

## 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

- Ernest Gallo Clinic and Research Center
- Rice University
- Savannah River National Lab
- University of South Florida

### RENEWED

- Albert Einstein College of Medicine
- The American Physiological Society
- American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology
- Brigham & Women’s Hospital
- Children’s Hospital Boston
- Dana Farber Cancer Institute
- Harvard Medical School
- Indiana University, Purdue University at Indianapolis
- Iowa State University
- Los Alamos National Laboratory
- Medical College of Wisconsin
- Michigan State University
- National Cancer Institute
- National Center for Atmospheric Research
- National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases
- National Organization of Gay and Lesbian Scientists and Technical Professionals
- New York Academy of Sciences
- Northwestern University
- Novartis Institutes for Biomedical Research, Inc.
- The Ohio State University College of Medicine
- Oregon State University
- Pacific Northwest National Lab
- Pennington Biomedical Research Center
- Purdue University
- The Scripps Research Institute
- Society of Toxicology
- St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital
- University of California, Berkeley
- University of California, Santa Cruz
- The University of Chicago
- The University of Pennsylvania
- The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston
- The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas
- The Wistar Institute
- University of Nebraska Medical Center
- University of Nebraska-Lincoln
- University of Texas at Austin
- University of Virginia
- Vanderbilt University Medical Center
- Wadsworth Center/NYSDOH
- Washington University in St. Louis
- Yale University

# International Postdoc Legal Issues: H Visas, the Cap and Beyond

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.*

The H-1B visa is the typical visa used by researchers and others to work temporarily in the United States and is capped at 65,000 visas per fiscal year (October 1 to September 30). In 1999, the U.S. Congress raised this number to 200,000 visas, a cap that was never met. However, following the events of 9/11, the U.S. Congress curtailed the cap increase at the original 65,000 cap. Although this cap continued not to be met due to economic conditions, every year since 2005 the cap has been reached, and it has been reached earlier and earlier every year. In 2007 the cap was reached on the first filing day of April 1 (for a start date of October 1). At the same time, Congress passed a new law which provided

an extra 20,000 H visas for persons who receive a Master's Degree or higher from an accredited American university.

In 2008, the United States Citizen and Immigration Service (USCIS) instituted a policy that imposed a random lottery for all H visa applications received during the first 5 business days of April. Applicants with at least a Master's degree are first counted towards the 20,000 cap and then the 65,000 cap. Applicants without such a degree are counted directly towards the 65,000 cap. If the 65,000 cap is not reached within the first 5 days, then on the day that the cap is reached, USCIS conducts a second lottery. For the upcoming fiscal year cap, H-1Bs were still available as of April 17, 2009.

It should be noted that not all H visa applications are counted towards the cap. Individuals who have already obtained an H visa are cap-exempt upon renewal. Furthermore, universities, governmental and non-profit research organizations are all cap-exempt. Indeed, anyone working at such an organization is exempt from the cap even if their actual employer is not cap-exempt (e.g. you work for a contractor that is for-profit, but your physical work location is at a university). It is important to remember as well that if you have an H visa that is cap-exempt you *cannot* switch to an employer who is subject to the cap unless there are cap-subject H visas that are available (e.g. after working at a university, a private company wants to employ you, but you cannot transfer your H visa unless the cap has not been reached). One way to solve this problem is to continue working at the cap-exempt organization on a part-time basis, during which time you can obtain another part-time H visa for an organization that is

## Download New Young Women in Science Booklet

New for 2009, Science/AAAS in collaboration with the L'Oréal Corporate Foundation is proud to bring you the [Young Women in Science booklet](#). Following on from last year's very successful Women in Science booklet, this year we bring you more exciting and inspirational stories. These new profiles, from interviews with young women at the start of their science careers, tell their stories of passion and persistence—what drives and excites them about their work in the sciences. We hope that young girls (and boys)—as well as their educators—will find fun and inspiration in these pages and learn a little about what life as a scientist is all about.

subject to the cap without being counted towards the cap (i.e. following from the above example, except you continue to work for the university, in which case your H visa for the company will not be subject to the cap).

Because of the available options, we would always urge you to talk with your attorney before accepting a position in order to understand all of your visa options.

*Adam Frank, Esq. and Brendan Delaney are at the law firm of Leavy & Frank, L.L.C. (<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.*

## International Postdoc Survival Guide

Are you dreaming of finding the perfect postdoctoral position in the USA but feel that you could benefit from guidance from international postdocs already in the USA? Do you have visa-related questions? Perhaps you are already in the USA and are now having problems obtaining a credit card? The NPA International Postdoc Committee has created a comprehensive survival guide to enhance the experience of doing a postdoc in the U.S. for International Postdocs. It includes our visa guide, information on what it is critical to know before accepting a postdoctoral position, and much more! Click [here](#) to check it out.

# Annual Meeting 2009



Nobel Laureate, Peter Doherty, PhD, Professor at the University of Tennessee Health Science Center in Memphis and the University of Melbourne, Australia, gave the Keynote Address.



The NPA Board of Directors and Membership Committee Leaders and Officers meet to discuss future directions for the NPA.



NPA Board of Directors Chair, Stacy Gelhaus (r) presents Michael Teitelbaum (l), Sloan Foundation Program Director, with the NPA Distinguished Service Award.



Dave Finger, Arindam Basu, Laurence Wood, Stacy Gelhaus and Jonathan Gitlin prepare for the launch of the NPA's new "Raising Our Voice" campaign.



Postdoc association leaders brainstorm on ways to address common problems during the NPA Leadership Workshop.



NPA members Judy Ho (l) and Fabian Filipp (r) catch up with Sam Castenada during a break from conference events.



NPA members Lorraine Tracey (l), Ian Brooks (m) and Jonathan Wiest (r) enjoy a Texas-sized BBQ.



Annual Meeting participants pack The University of Texas M. D. Anderson Cancer Center auditorium.



During the BBQ, the NPA recognized Advisory Board members.



NPA Board Chair, Stacy Gelhaus (l), spends quality time with Brenda Timmons (m), NPA Annual Meeting Chair, and Jill Larson (r).

2004  
Washington, D.C.

2005  
San Diego

2006  
Bethesda

2003 & 2007  
Berkeley

2008  
Boston

2009  
Houston

2010  
Philadelphia

2011  
Your city?

# Where will NPA's 9th Annual Meeting be?

The National Postdoctoral Association is now accepting proposals to host its 9th Annual Meeting in 2011.

The NPA Annual Meeting is the only national meeting dedicated to the postdoctoral community and provides a venue for exchange of best practices and networking.

Hosting an Annual Meeting is a great opportunity to highlight your area institutions, your postdoctoral programs, and your hometown—and support the NPA at the same time.



Download the Request for Proposal.

Submission deadline: July 10, 2009

Contact Cathee Johnson Phillips with questions at:  
[cjphillips@nationalpostdoc.org](mailto:cjphillips@nationalpostdoc.org)