



The Post-y

Spring 2007



Semi-annual Newsletter of the Society of Toxicology Postdoctoral Assembly

Message from the Outgoing Chair

Jennifer Duringer

Dear SOT Postdocs~

I would like to thank the outgoing PDA Board (Mihalis Panagiotidis, Aaron Rowland and Kristen Mitchell), our Council Liaison Scott Burchiel, our headquarters staff member Betty Eidemiller and all of the postdoctoral representatives for a wonderful year with the Postdoctoral Assembly. Their hard work and efforts resulted in many of the programs and projects implemented this year which were designed to improve and enhance the postdoctoral experience. Below is a short listing of a few of our accomplishments:

- Creation of the first-ever Best Postdoctoral Publication Awards.
- Partnership with the Career Resource and Development (CRAD) Committee to form the Postdoctoral Mentoring Program.
- Creation of a separate Postdoctoral membership category.
- Numerous events at the Annual Meeting in Charlotte including the Postdoctoral Luncheon, sponsorship of the CRAD symposia "You Just Can't Focus on the Science," and distribution of postdoc lapel pins.

Please check out our website at <http://www.toxicology.org/ai/spd/PD.asp> for more information and a current listing of what is happening in the PDA.

I hope that many of you will consider volunteering for the PDA in some form this year. It provides great leadership opportunities, allowing you to interact with other scientists from diverse fields and build your ever-growing network. The Board has jobs big and small so please contact SOT headquarters at SOTHQ@toxicology.org or look up a Board member on our website and start volunteering today! In addition, any ideas you might have for improving the PDA are welcome.

I am turning the reins over to Kristen Mitchell who will do an outstanding job leading the Postdoctoral Assembly and moving the postdoc agenda forward, along with our newly elected Board members.

Thanks again for a wonderful year and best wishes to you all!

Jennifer Duringer

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Thank you to the following individuals who contributed to the goals and efforts of the Postdoctoral Assembly this year:

Outgoing Board Members: Jennifer Duringer, Mihalis Panagiotidis, Aaron Rowland, Kristen Mitchell

Council Liaison Scott Burchiel and Headquarters Staff Member Betty Eidemiller

Postdoctoral Representatives: Celine Beamer, Sachin Devi, Jamie DeWitt, Pavlavi Limaye, Jeffrey Moffitt, Sharmilee Sawant, Miyun Tsai-Turton and Jianyong Wang



Message from the Incoming Chair

Kristen Mitchell



Greetings! As Councilor of the PDA Board this past year, I have enjoyed working with SOT postdocs, as well as with members of the PDA Board, SOT Council and staff, all of whom have selflessly contributed their time and efforts to help the PDA accomplish its goals. I look forward to continuing to serve the postdoctoral community within SOT as Chair of the PDA Board for the 2007-2008 year. I am confident that together we can maintain the unprecedented momentum that the PDA enjoyed last year, while expanding our goals and activities to meet the needs of SOT postdocs over the next year.

One specific goal that I would like to see realized over the next year is to increase the participation and visibility of postdocs within SOT. Central to this mission is the establishment of two-way communication between postdocs and SOT entities, such as Committees, Regional Chapters, Specialty Sections and Special Interest Groups. Securing such postdoctoral representation will remain a priority this year, as it provides an excellent avenue for communication between postdocs and SOT, while offering numerous opportunities for postdocs to assume leadership roles within the Society.

Additional opportunities for communication between postdocs and SOT include publication of this online newsletter, *The Post-Y*. The newsletter is an effective way for the PDA Board to succinctly communicate with SOT postdocs and for postdocs to communicate with each other. We welcome ideas for articles and are always looking for people to write short articles of interest to SOT postdocs in general. In addition to the newsletter, the PDA Board is currently creating an on-line survey to find out how to best meet the needs of SOT postdocs. This survey remains one of the most effective ways for postdocs to provide input to SOT, and results from this survey will directly steer the ambitions of the PDA Board over the next year.

On behalf of the incoming PDA Board, I look forward to communicating with you and working together to make SOT a valuable resource to meet the career development needs of postdocs and early career scientists.

Kristen Mitchell

Biosketches for This Year's Board

Chair: Kristen Mitchell, 2007-2008



I am currently a Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of Pharmacology and Toxicology at the University of Texas Medical Branch (UTMB) in Galveston, where I study the role of the aryl hydrocarbon receptor in cell cycle progression. Since arriving at UTMB in 2003, I have been actively engaged in addressing the concerns of postdocs as Co-Chair of the UTMB Organization of Postdoctoral Scientists and as a member of the International Postdoc Committee of the National Postdoctoral Association. Serving as Councilor of the SOT Postdoctoral Assembly (PDA) Board during the 2006-07 year was certainly a privilege for me, and I am thrilled with the strides made by the PDA towards increasing the visibility of postdocs within SOT and acknowledging their contribution to the progress of science within the Society. I am honored to have the opportunity to continue to serve you during the 2007-08 year as Chair of the PDA Board. I look forward to working with you and am confident that the PDA will continue to provide unparalleled leadership, networking, and career development opportunities designed to fulfill your postdoctoral experience.

Co-Chair: Heather Floyd, 2007-2008



My name is Heather Floyd and I am running for the co-chair position for SOT PDA. I received my Ph.D. from Wake Forest University from the department of Cancer Biology in May 2005 where my dissertation work focused on lung cancer. I then proceeded to a postdoc at Tulane University where I briefly continued working in the lung cancer field. Unfortunately, Hurricane Katrina brought a tremendous halt to my research, where I lost all of my experiments and research animals. With New Orleans' and Tulane's recovery looking unstable, I relocated to North Carolina, accepting a postdoctoral position at the US EPA. My current research focus is in the field of cardiovascular disease; though this is far from my graduate training, I am quickly learning the field. I have held this position for a little over a year now and am extremely happy with this career transition. Throughout my career, I have been a member of SOT and am very familiar with the organization. I would like to see the assembly do a few things, but most importantly in my eyes is postdoctoral integration into SOT as a whole. The Web site indicates that this is a point of interest for the

Assembly, which I believe to be a necessary plan. This integration will not only benefit postdocs for critical networking and learning purposes, but SOT as well, since we are the future of the organization. I can offer experience since I am a member of a few Specialty Sections, have sat on the board of the Molecular Biology Specialty Section for 2 years, and have helped with CE courses. I would enjoy learning and understanding more about the dynamics of SOT. My participation in the organization has always been positive and I would be pleased to serve as PDA co-chair.

(Continued Page 3)

Winners of the First-Ever Best Postdoctoral Publication Awards!!!

The Postdoctoral Assembly (PDA) of the Society of Toxicology is pleased to announce its first Best Postdoctoral Publication Awards which were created to recognize talented postdoctoral researchers who have recently published exceptional papers in the field of toxicology. Three awards consisting of a plaque and a \$100 cash award each were presented at the Postdoctoral Assembly Luncheon on March 28, 2007 during the SOT Annual Meeting. The winners are:

Nadine Dragin, University of Cincinnati For Dioxin-induced Birth Defects, Mouse or Human CYP1A2 in Maternal Liver Protects whereas Mouse CYP1A1 and CYP1B1 are Inconsequential. The Journal of Biological Chemistry, VOL. 281, NO. 27, pp. 18591-18600, July 7, 2006.

Kristen Mitchell, University of Texas Medical Branch Sustained Aryl Hydrocarbon Receptor Activity attenuates Liver Regeneration. Mol Pharmacol. 2006 Jul;70(1):163-70. Epub 2006 April 24, 2006.

Drobna Zuzana, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Metabolism and Toxicity of Arsenic in Human Urothelial Cells Expressing Rat Arsenic (+3 oxidation state)-methyltransferase. Toxicology and Applied Pharmacology 207 (2005) pp. 147-159, 2005.



Biosketches for This Year's Board

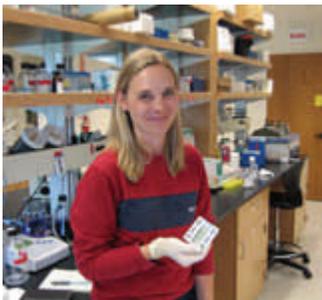
Councilor: Heather Persson, 2007-2008



I am presently employed as an associate scientist at Nektar Therapeutics in San Carlos, CA. My main focus is nonclinical drug development with an emphasis on inhalation drug candidates. One of my more important functions is as a liaison for toxicological studies that are conducted with a variety of clinical research organizations. Safety assessments of manufacturing materials, excipients, leachables, and extractables are a routine part of my role at Nektar. Furthermore, I have had the opportunity to contribute to several regulatory submissions, the most significant of such being an IND. As an entry level scientist, I am learning the practical applications and processes involved in both the pharmaceutical and the regulatory industries. I am currently a member of the Society of Toxicology, American College of Toxicology, Society of Toxicologic Pathology, and American Association of Pharmaceutical Scientists.

I received my Ph.D. in Toxicology from Saint John's University, Jamaica, NY in September 2005. My doctoral research was on the molecular mechanisms of pulmonary fibrosis and possible therapeutic interventions. Previous to that, I received my BA in Biochemistry from New York University, New York, NY. My interest in the position of Councilor is rooted in my desire to help other graduate students and postdocs in their career preparations. As a recent graduate, I have a good deal of insight into what information is helpful when preparing to enter "the real world". As a fairly new employee of a mid-size biotech company, I have experienced what its like to start out in the industry, as well as what skill sets and knowledge may help to prepare for the transition from an academic setting.

Secretary/Treasurer: Amy Skinner, 2007-2008



I received my Ph.D. in Toxicology from Oregon State University (Corvallis, OR) in the fall of 2006. I performed my doctoral research at the Center for Research on Occupational and Environmental Toxicology (CROET) at Oregon Health and Sciences University (OHSU). I previously earned my B.A. in Biology at Concordia University (Portland, OR). I am currently working as a postdoctoral fellow in the laboratory of Dr. Peter Kurre in the Department of Pediatric Hematology/ Oncology at OHSU. I am interested in hematopoietic stem cell-mediated gene therapy of Fanconi Anemia as a paradigm for the *in situ* delivery of HIV-derived lentivector particles.

There are two objectives I would like to achieve as Secretary/Treasurer of the PDA. First, I believe the Postdoctoral Assembly is a valuable resource for postdocs because this period is often a difficult transition time for scientists as they make decisions that mold their future careers. Therefore, I believe the governing board members should serve as a sounding board for other postdocs, in the sense that they are a designated group of people with whom problems and concerns may be shared and heard. Additionally, they are a designated group of people responsible for providing useful information regarding issues such as networking, career advancement, as well as other opportunities. Second, I believe that as members of the Society of Toxicology, we are ambassadors of the science of toxicology to lay-people. Therefore, as a governing board member of the PDA, I think it will be important to lead by example and develop ideas for promoting our involvement in our respective communities.

Recap of the Annual Meeting in Charlotte

Jennifer Duringer

This year proved to be an exciting Annual Meeting for postdocs. To start off the meeting, the PDA handed out lapel pins with the Charlotte insignia and the word “postdoc” across the top to distinguish postdoctoral members. In addition, the PDA hosted or co-sponsored many events geared towards making sure postdocs get the resources and information they need most! Below is a short recap of some of those events:

- Sunday night Student/Postdoc Mixer:** Students and postdocs gathered in a relaxed atmosphere and began the meeting catching up with old friends and networking with new ones. Posters and representatives from each of the Specialty Sections were on-hand to provide information and interest students and postdocs in signing up for the free Specialty Section which is included with a Student/Postdoc membership in SOT.
- Wednesday afternoon Postdoctoral Luncheon:** Postdocs had a chance to kick back and relax as they enjoyed a sit-down luncheon designed to promote networking and celebrate postdocs in the Society. SOT President Jim Popp provided opening remarks, followed by comments from current Chair Jennifer Duringer and Incoming Chair Kristen Mitchell. Winners of the first ever Best Postdoctoral Publications awards were announced in addition to recognition of all Specialty Section, Regional Chapter and Special Interest Group award winners. Those in attendance had a wonderful time! The PDA hopes to continue this event next year.
- Wednesday afternoon symposia “You Just Can’t Focus on the Science”:** The Career Resource and Development Committee teamed up with the PDA to bring an outstanding seminar which focused on leadership and communication skills that young investigators need to develop in addition to

the usual bench and writing skills. Speakers included Tom Kawabata and Leigh Ann Burns-Naas from Pfizer Global Research in addition to 80 books given out on “Making the Right Moves” from Burroughs-Wellcome/HHMI. Power point slides and notes from this session are available at http://www.toxicology.org/ai/spd/PDA_Symposia_2007.pdf.

- Wednesday afternoon mixer with Council and Students and Postdocs:** This year, the Student Advisory Committee (SAC) and the PDA decided to merge the meetings with Council into a single mixer where all students and postdocs were invited to speak with Council members in a casual atmosphere. After brief remarks from SOT President Jim Popp, SAC President John Norman and PDA Chair Jennifer Duringer, attendees mingled and engaged in lively discussion.



Potential K-12 Outreach Program

Hey postdocs, do you have elementary school-aged children? Are you interested in an outreach project? Did you know that skin cancers often result from sunburns experienced in childhood? UV radiation is an extremely potent genotoxin but it is possible to take steps to reduce exposure, and therefore, decrease future skin cancer risk. The EPA has developed curriculum for the “SunWise Program,” which is aimed at teaching elementary school children the importance of UV awareness and protection. By registering as a SunWise Partner at www.epa.gov/sunwise/becoming_partner.html you will receive a SunWise Tool Kit consisting of classroom activities for K-2, 3-5, and 6-8 grade levels, a UV-sensitive frisbee, and the **On the Trail of the Missing Ozone** comic book, which reinforces the sun safety lessons. You can volunteer at your child’s school, or, better yet, convince a school administrator to become a SunWise School. By investing the time now to teach children about the dangers of UV radiation you can make a difference in the health of your community.

Project: EPA Sunwise



Specialty Sections, Special Interest Groups, and Regional Chapters Have a Lot to Offer

Heather Floyd

Over the past year, one main goal of the PDA has been to facilitate the integration of postdocs into the organization of the society. To encourage this integration, postdocs have been placed on the boards of Specialty Sections (SS), Special Interest Groups (SIG), and Regional Chapters (RC) as representatives. These positions open doors for leadership roles, unique idea contributions, and most importantly, networking with an established group of toxicologists. Though there has been incredible interest and support from postdocs, SS, SIG, and RC, there is still a long road ahead to fulfill the goals of this endeavor.

Awareness of available opportunities within these groups for postdocs is a priority of the PDA. The SOT Web site offers detailed lists and descriptions of the travel awards and monetary awards that are available. Many of these awards are offered to support travel to the Annual Meeting, as well as representative positions on the boards of these groups, providing opportunities that otherwise would not be possible. Currently, not all groups offer awards and positions to postdocs, therefore continued participation is encouraged in order to demonstrate the enthusiasm of postdocs in toxicology. The PDA hopes this enthusiasm will further extend the opportunities for postdoctoral leadership and networking.

Your Postdoctoral Representatives: Pallavi Limaye (Allegheny-Erie), Aldona Karaczyn (Northeast), Celine Beamer (Pacific Northwest), Yu Janet Zang (Carcinogenesis), Sachin Devi (Comparative and Veterinary), Adrienne Black (Dermal Toxicology), Stacey Anderson (Immunotoxicology), Sonia Miranda (In Vitro), Lauren Aleksunes (Mechanisms), Jianyong Wang (Occupational and Public Health), Miyun Tsai Turton (Reproductive and Developmental Toxicology), Sharmilee Sawant (Women in Toxicology), Jeffrey Moffit (Education Committee)

Gender Based Salary Differences

Heather Persson

It was recently reported by the American Association of University Women Educational Foundation that women earn less than their male colleagues as early as one year out of college. This pay gap widens substantially causing a woman to lose up to \$500,000 over the course of her career.

I should preface by stating that this is not one of those "I am woman, hear me roar" type of articles. Actually the reason behind this salary gap was explained as being rooted in typically inherent female traits. I am also not saying that females are a weaker sex, but one that is still finding its proper place in the workforce. Females have yet to tap into our strong points fully to achieve the desired outcome as higher salaries or most stature.



The primary reason given for the salary discrepancy was explained as a lack of negotiation of the first salary. If females get a bad start out of the gates, it sets the tone for the rest of their careers. If a male scientist is able to negotiate his first salary to about 10% higher than a female scientist, unless she gets an extremely generous raise, she will not be able to recover that difference.

And now the question poses itself "why are female scientists poor negotiators"? This answer is slightly more complex. It extends back to our desire to please or not cause any type of ill-feelings. Most women, including myself, are afraid to negotiate as we are afraid to appear too greedy or self-righteous. As a recent graduate, I did not feel the skill set that I acquired gave me sufficient leverage to negotiate. Sure, I'd learned enough to join the workforce but I did not know anything about GLP compliance, IND filings, Phase 2 readiness, or anything about the inner workings of the biotech industry. I knew how to perform immunocytochemistry studies, design ELISA assays, perform literature searches, and perform surgical procedures on hamsters.

What could I have done differently? Besides researching starting salaries thoroughly, I could have talked to people in the industry. This may not be the easiest or appear as the most politically correct thing to do, but it sure would have helped to find out exactly what pay someone in my position started at. Actually the best time to ask people about their salaries is before you join their organization. People are less inclined to tell a co-worker what they are paid than someone who is an outsider.

Another important ideal is to remember to focus on the professional, not the personal. Work is not a popularity contest. Yes, you do have to be civil to your coworkers and clients but not at your own risk. You do not have to sell yourself short to make someone else happy. This ties back to not being afraid to "rock the boat" by asking for more money. Give it a shot, you never know what the outcome may be unless you try.

Highlights from the National Postdoctoral Association Annual Meeting

Kristen Mitchell

OVERVIEW

The fifth annual meeting of the National Postdoctoral Association (NPA) was held at the end of March 2007 at the UC Berkeley Clark Kerr Conference Center in Berkeley, California. This three-day meeting was designed to bring together postdocs and leaders of postdoctoral associations to discuss current and future trends in postdoctoral training in the U.S. Some of the major accomplishments of the NPA over the past year are summarized below:

- 1) The need to provide additional funding opportunities for postdocs transitioning to independent investigator status was met through the inception of the new NIH-sponsored K99/R00 program *Pathways to Independence*. This funding mechanism provides support to scientists for two years during the postdoctoral training period, and an additional three years upon securing a tenure-track faculty position.
- 2) In response to the need to provide adequate compensation to NIH-funded postdocs, the institutional allowance associated with NRSA postdoctoral fellowships was increased.
- 3) To clarify NIH regulations that influence postdoctoral classifications, the "NIH/NSF Definition of a Postdoctoral Scholar" was created. This definition describes a postdoc as follows: *An individual who has received a doctoral degree (or equivalent) and is engaged in a temporary and defined period of mentored advanced training to enhance the professional skills and research independence needed to pursue his or her chosen career path.*
- 4) To increase the availability of outreach resources and services, the NPA recently launched a speakers bureau, which provides a searchable list of highly recommended speakers available to discuss numerous topics of interest to postdocs and postdoctoral associations.

SYMPOSIUM: EVOLUTION OF POSTDOCTORAL FELLOWSHIP PROGRAMS

One particularly dynamic symposium session included speakers representing the NIH, NSF, and the Burroughs Wellcome (BW) Fund. Dr. Peter Preusch spoke about NIH funding mechanisms for postdocs, noting that the NRSA postdoctoral fellowships have changed little since their inception in 1974. In contrast, considerable strides have been made in expanding the "K" career awards, including the newly created K99/R00 (referred to as "kangaroo") awards. Preusch commented that the number of fellowship applications increased during 2003-2006, while the number of awards experienced little growth, making current postdoctoral fellowships highly competitive.

Dr. Carter Kimsey spoke on behalf of the NSF and stated that the NSF is currently in a doubling phase, while recognizing that the NSF budget for medical research is nowhere near that of the NIH. In the near future, NSF funding in the biological sciences will emphasize environmental biology and biological informatics. Kimsey emphasized that most of the NSF postdoctoral fellowships require the applicant to submit an application within twelve months of receiving the Ph.D.

Representing the BW Fund, Dr. Victoria McGovern stated that the BW Career Award in Biological Sciences has ended, and new awards will be geared towards the training and development of early-career clinicians. McGovern made the comment that "not as many people apply for BW Fund awards as you might think" and encouraged postdocs to consider applying for BW funding.

SYMPOSIUM: POSTDOCS ON VISAS

This session provided advice on how international postdocs who are in the U.S. on visas can successfully transition into a U.S.-based job. The highlights of this session are outlined below:

- About 60% of postdocs in the U.S. are here on visas. Nearly 50% of all postdocs in the U.S. earned their Ph.D. in a different country. About 40% of the U.S. doctoral labor force in science and engineering is foreign-born.
- International postdocs working in the U.S. appear to make a greater contribution to patent creation yet typically receive stipends that are 10% less than postdocs who are U.S. citizens.

For postdocs working in the U.S. on visas, one prevailing concern is the lack of job mobility for those who are not happy working in their current lab. To address this, symposium speakers suggested creating a work permit that isn't restricted by employer, so that international postdocs would be able to work throughout the U.S.



Highlights from NPA Meeting (continued)

PLENARY SESSION WITH DR. ELIAS ZERHOUNI, DIRECTOR OF NIH

The highlight of this year's NPA meeting was the plenary session entitled *NIH and the Next Generation of Scientists*, with Dr. Elias Zerhouni, Director of the NIH. Dr. Zerhouni began with a discussion of what science will look like in the near future, stating that the "transformation of medicine and health in the 21st century will depend on mastering life sciences." Furthermore, Zerhouni predicted that this transformation would be driven by major factors including socioeconomics, demographics, global health, "landscape" of disease, and scientific challenges and opportunities.

According to Zerhouni, key public health challenges will include a shift from acute to chronic disease conditions, providing adequate health care for the aging population, addressing health disparities and emerging and re-emerging diseases, such as obesity. Zerhouni stressed that health care in the 21st century should aim to intervene before symptoms appear and to preserve normal function as long as possible. He contrasted this with health care of the 20th century, in which diseases were treated when symptoms appear, often at the expense of normal function. In order to transform medicine from "curative" to "preemptive," the future paradigm of medicine will be characterized by what he referred to as the "four P's": predictive, personalized, preemptive and participatory.

Dr. Zerhouni also discussed the availability of several new NIH awards, including the "NIH Director's Pioneer Awards," designed to support potentially groundbreaking ideas. These awards are highly competitive, and applicants undergo a unique review process that includes an abbreviated proposal review time and a personal interview. Another award, the "NIH Director's New Innovator Award," is geared towards providing funding for new investigators who have not yet received an R01. These five-year awards would provide \$1.5 million in direct costs. Fourteen new awards will be given in September 2007.

In addition to speaking about funding mechanisms, Dr. Zerhouni also discussed the current funding situation at the NIH, reminding the audience that "funding goes in cycles" and cautioning them to "not give in to pessimism." One approach to manage the currently "tight" NIH budget is to stabilize the number of competing grants and to not offer inflationary adjustments for non-competing renewals in 2007. Finally, Dr. Zerhouni left the audience with this concluding remark: "The greatest risk in science is to stop taking risks."

Toxicology training grant provides unique teaching opportunity

Kristen Mitchell

For postdocs who are pursuing academic research careers, obtaining teaching experience can be a challenge. For many postdocs, the responsibilities of conducting laboratory research, writing manuscripts, and preparing grants leave little time at the end of the day for participating in teaching opportunities. Furthermore, for postdocs at academic institutions without a substantial undergraduate student population, opportunities to step foot inside a classroom can be few and far between.

At the University of Texas Medical Branch (UTMB) in Galveston, postdoctoral fellows supported by an NIEHS institutional training grant (T32) are provided with a unique opportunity to hone their teaching skills in a mentored environment that requires minimal time commitment. The nine pre- and postdoctoral fellows supported by the UTMB Environmental Toxicology Training Grant collectively teach a three-credit course entitled *Fundamentals of Toxicology* to undergraduate students at nearby Texas A&M University at Galveston (TAMUG). The course is geared towards upper-level undergraduate students and is conveniently taught in the evenings. Midway through the course, TAMUG students travel to the UTMB campus, where they participate in a hands-on research project. Trainees divide up responsibilities for course administration including maintaining the course website, organizing each exam, keeping records of grades, and scheduling guest lectures. However, what is so unique about this course is that each of the trainees on the toxicology training grant is responsible for preparing and delivering lectures, writing and grading exams, and leading dis-

cussions on selected articles in toxicology. Because the number of trainees participating in this course is fairly large, the time commitment required by individual trainees is minimal, typically ranging from 12-15 hours throughout the semester.

Dr. Mary Treinen-Moslen is the director of the UTMB Environmental Toxicology Training Grant, which has been supported by the NIEHS continuously for the past 20+ years. Dr. Moslen established this innovative opportunity as a means to provide substantial teaching experience to those trainees interested in pursuing academic research careers upon completing their tenure at UTMB. Trainees receive feedback on their teaching performance from each other, from the undergraduate students, as well as from Dr. Moslen, who enjoys helping trainees prepare their lectures and strives to mentor them throughout the process. The course has enjoyed much success at TAMUG, as this year is the fifth consecutive year that it has been taught.



How to Establish a Postdoc Association

Kristen Mitchell

Although the specific goals of postdoctoral associations (PDAs) vary among institutions, most PDAs are created with the mission of meeting the unique needs of scientists during the postdoctoral training period. Some specific goals may include establishing minimum salaries, fair-market salary ranges, and retirement benefits for postdocs at institutions in which no such formal policies exist. PDAs at some institutions have successfully lobbied to ensure that postdocs receive adequate health insurance on par with other university employees. Many PDAs also utilize an interactive approach to address the professional development of postdocs, such as sponsoring postdoc-specific research symposia, hosting grant-writing workshops, and establishing mentoring programs. In general, PDAs are eager to receive input from their postdoctoral constituents, so don't be shy in approaching your institution's PDA if you have a suggestion or concern.

How does one begin to organize a PDA? PDAs at several institutions have published their experiences about establishing a PDA and the unexpected hurdles they encountered in doing so. At most institutions, the early days of establishing a PDA consisted of identifying exactly who is and who is not a postdoc, which is no small feat considering that many postdocs are hired with a nondescript title such as "Research Associate" or "Research Technician," etc., depending on the department and source of funding. After identifying a substantial portion of postdocs, most PDAs distributed surveys to identify some of the most important concerns of their fellow postdocs. Such concerns tend to range from salary and benefits to professional development and job seeking strategies. Identifying the main concerns of postdocs at your institution will help guide the goals and strategies of your newly formed PDA.

The National Postdoc Association (NPA) provides a wealth of information for postdocs looking to start a PDA. Such resources include an online toolkit for establishing a PDA, an online database of institutions that already have a PDA, a mentoring program to provide guidance to new PDA leaders, and an outreach program through which NPA staff and volunteers will come to your institution to address the unique concerns of establishing a PDA.

Some excellent resources are listed below:

- National Postdoc Association: <http://www.nationalpostdoc.org>
- Postdoctoral Scholars at Stanford University: <http://www.postdocs.stanford.edu>
- Establishing a Postdoctoral Association at Brown University: <http://www.brown.edu/Administration/bupa/bucci.html>

THE POSTDOCTORAL ASSEMBLY WEB SITE IS LOCATED AT:
[HTTP://WWW.TOXICOLOGY.ORG/AI/SPD/PD.ASP](http://www.toxicology.org/ai/spd/pd.asp)

Calling All Postdocs!



While the Board enjoys putting together this newsletter each edition, we know there are others of you out there who have a knack for writing! If you have something to communicate to SOT postdocs, whether it's strictly informational or a "life experience" story you think would help other postdocs, please consider submitting an article for our next issue due out in the Fall of 2007. If you would like to cover one of the projects the PDA is working on, we have a need for that as well. Please feel free to contact us at SOTHQ@toxicology.org for further details.

