Preparing for a Postdoc

URMC Postdoctoral Association
Primary Purpose of a Postdoc

“…to broaden and deepen the research and other skills that are required for a significant contribution to society and satisfying, professional employment.”

Committee on Science, Engineering, and Public Policy

“Enhancing the postdoctoral experience for scientists and engineers”, 2000
What is a postdoc?

“...first and foremost a period of apprenticeship for the purpose of gaining scientific, technical, and professional skills that advance the professional career.”

- Advanced degree (PhD, MD)
- Supervised by a advisor/mentor
- Research/Teaching
- Salary support: Independent/PI grant
- Duration: 1 – 5 years
- Path to independent career – academic / professional
Do you need to do a postdoc?

- Figure out your career trajectory
  - Will postdoc help you with your ultimate career?

- Find a position that helps you take steps in that direction

- Not sure?
Career Paths for PhDs

- Research
  - Pharma, Biotech, Academic, Gov’t, CRO, Non-profit
- Teaching
  - University, College, High School
- Communications
  - Science writing, Editing, Publishing, Education
- Consulting
- Tech Transfer/IP/Patent Law
- Science Administration
- Science Policy
- Forensics
What should you do?

1. Assemble CV (feedback) – scientific and soft skills
2. Identify Likes/Dislikes
3. Identify Goals – 30 second ‘elevator speech’
4. Learn about different careers / Job boards
   - LinkedIn groups
   - BioCareers
   - Versatile PhD
   - Science careers / Nature jobs
   - University Website / listservs
5. Network – people want to help
   - Meetings – start with who you know; help others
   - Email
   - Phone ‘informational interview’ is your friend
6. Go to seminars – listen to questions!

Slide adapted from Alicia Augustine
Networking – 4 Questions

1. Could you describe your position and how you got there?
2. What are your career goals?
3. How could I make myself more marketable for a position like yours? (CV sent ahead of time)
4. Where do you think the future of academia/pharma/biotech/government is going?

- Strategize and fill in holes!
Practical issues for postdocs

- Advisor/Mentor
- Funding/Publications
- Project design
- Responsibilities/Opportunities
- Salary
- Benefits
- Support
What to look for in your mentor?

- Active in his/her field (grants, publications)
- Current status of mentor’s previous trainees
- Will this mentor be your good colleague?
- Establishing expectations
Funding/Publications

- What grants does the PI have?
- How long will they last?
- Are they likely to get renewed?
- How have they published in the last 5 years?

- NIH Reporter
- NSF Award Search
Project Design

- Read the PI’s grants if they’ll let you
- What are your long-term goals?
  - Make sure your project is fitting
    - Academia – try to envision the next grant/spin-offs
    - Industry – High throughput, team science
- Will you jump on a “moving train” or will you need to develop your own system?
Responsibilities/Opportunities

- Teaching
- Mentoring students
- Writing fellowships and/or grants
Salary

- Grant
- Fellowship
- Training grant
- NIH Stipend standards
Benefits

- Funding source may affect eligibility status
- Student vs. Employee Health Insurance
- Dental Insurance
- Family Plans
- Retirement
- Tuition benefits
Support

- Are there lots of postdocs at the institution?
- Is there a PDA/PDO?
- Graduate student camaraderie vs. postdoc
- How big is the lab?
- Are the lab members happy?
Anything else to consider?

- Branching out to a different field from your thesis area: broadens your CV (dependent on your goals)
- Current “hot” areas of science / funding
- Geographical preference
Before you accept the offer

- Is this what you want?
- Are you excited?
- Evaluate Institution
- Read what the offer letter says:
  - Salary
  - Benefits
  - Start/end date
  - Terms of contract
  - Research responsibility/ expectation
- Before you start your postdoc
  - Of course – finish your PhD
  - Take a vacation!
When you land in your postdoc

- Make the most of it!
- Get the project up and running – Publish
- Dynamics may be different from when you are a grad student
  - Advise mentor, train students, run the lab
- Network with other postdocs (your peers – now and later)
- Lookout for funding opportunities
- Teach (if this is your passion)
- This is not a permanent position, so look for ‘real’ jobs
Resources

- Teaching Postdoc
  - [http://www.nationalpostdoc.org/careers/career-planning-resources/186-postdoctoral-teaching-fellowships](http://www.nationalpostdoc.org/careers/career-planning-resources/186-postdoctoral-teaching-fellowships)

- Grant writing (NRSA –F32)

- Science Policy
  - [http://fellowships.aaas.org/](http://fellowships.aaas.org/)

- Communications Postdoctoral Fellowship
  - [http://sciwrite.org/sciwrite/sciwrite.html](http://sciwrite.org/sciwrite/sciwrite.html)
  - [http://www.aaas.org/programs/education/MassMedia/](http://www.aaas.org/programs/education/MassMedia/)

- Administrative Fellowships

- Clinical Research Fellowships