

# Preparing for a Postdoc

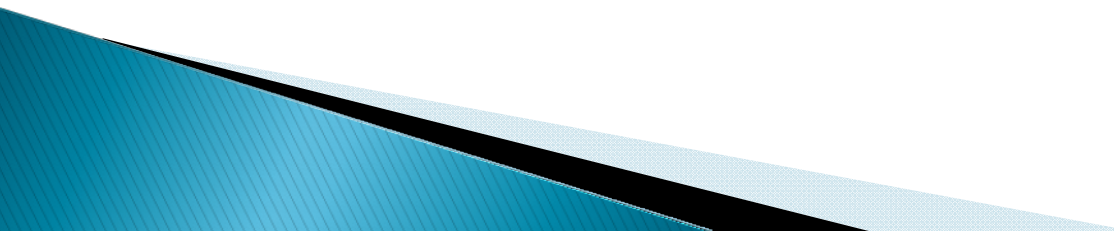
URMC Postdoctoral Association



# 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!



# Networking – 4 Questions

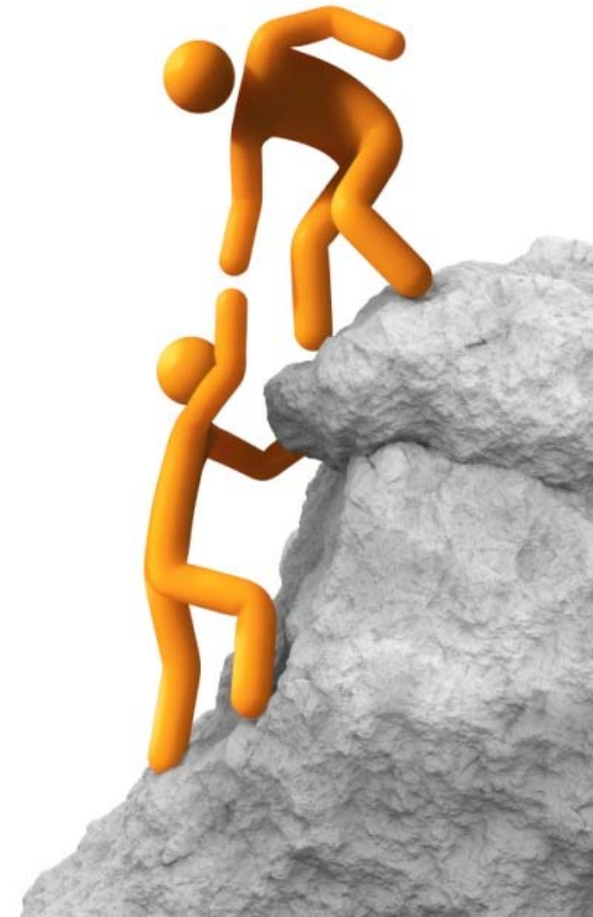
1. Could you describe your position and how you got there?
  2. What are your career goals?
  3. How could I make myself more marketable for a position like yours? (CV sent ahead of time)
  4. Where do you think the future of academia/pharma/biotech/government is going?
- Strategize and fill in holes!





# 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](#)



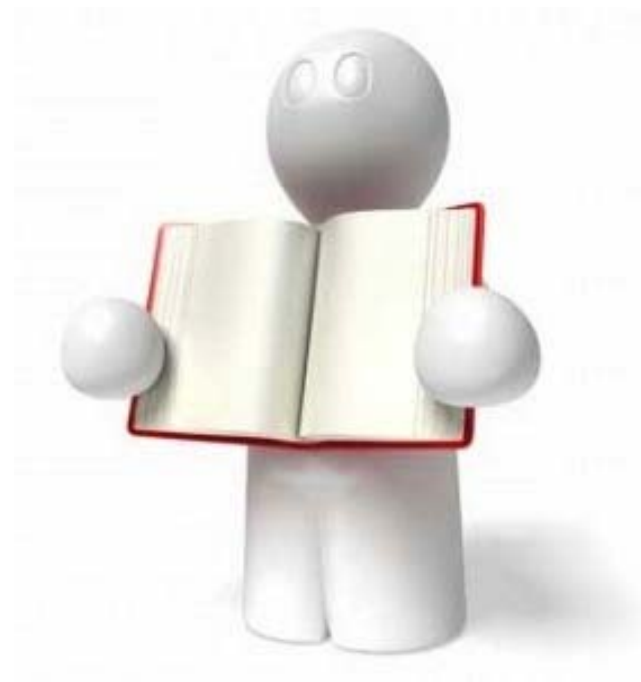
# Project Design

- ▶ 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



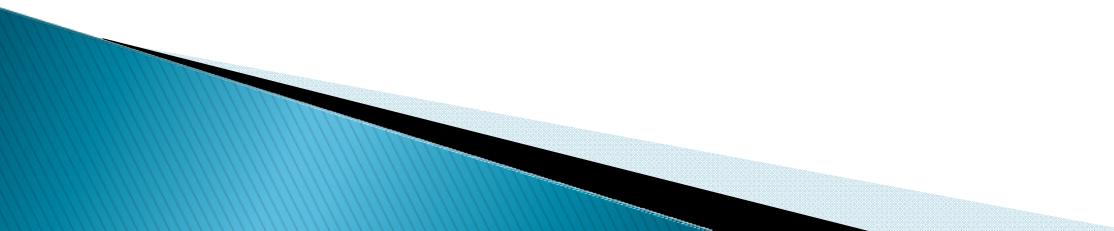
# Support

- ▶ 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?

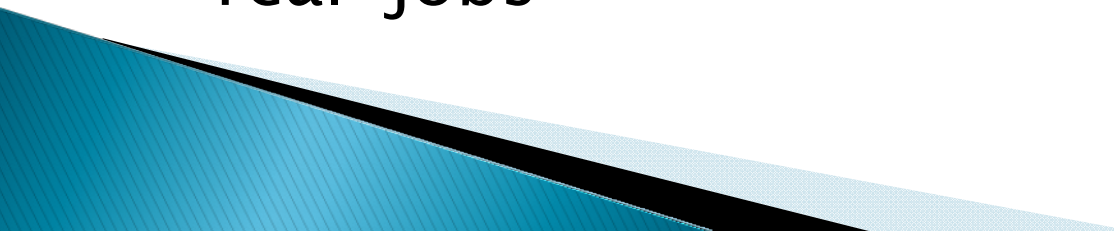
- ▶ Branching out to a different field from your thesis area: broadens your CV (dependent on your goals)
  - ▶ Current “hot” areas of science / funding
  - ▶ Geographical preference
- 

# 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>

## ▶ Grant writing (NRSA –F32)

- <http://www.nigms.nih.gov/Training/IndivPostdoc/PostdocFellowsFAQ.htm>

## ▶ Science Polilcy

- <http://fellowships.aaas.org/>

## ▶ Communications Postdoctoral Fellowship

- <http://sciwrite.org/sciwrite/sciwrite.html>
- <http://www.aaas.org/programs/education/MassMedia/>
- <http://www.princeton.edu/writing/wse/postdoc/>

## ▶ Administrative Fellowships

- <http://www.pmf.gov/>

## ▶ Clinical Research Fellowships

- <http://www.cato.com/fp.shtml>

# Questions?

