



The Voice

Stanford University Postdoctoral Association

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ANNOUNCEMENT
Please be on the
lookout for the
Annual SUPD
Survey. A link
will be sent to
your email. Survey
results are used to
improve the postdoc
experience so fill it
out and be heard!

From the SUPD Co-Chairs

As we hear about home foreclosures, rising unemployment, and financial meltdowns, it's easy to overlook the faces of postdocs who are deeply affected by the current financial crisis. Will we be able to find jobs? How can we prepare for jobs as the market for postdocs changes? Are traditional metrics of progress sufficient to guide us in career planning? As postdoc advocates, our role is to highlight the novel and traditional needs of postdocs. Highest among those needs is the prominence that career planning and career training should play for postdocs.

For the past 20 years, the postdoc experience has lacked a cohesive career training element. This was exacerbated recently as severe budget shortfalls contracted the number of available new faculty positions. Put bluntly, too many postdocs are training for careers that are no longer available. The University is (understandably) overwhelmed by the financial aspects of the crisis, but we feel that the University's highest obligation is to prepare its students. According to the 2008 SUPD annual survey, 75% of postdocs came to Stanford with long-term academic career plans. Yet, nationwide, less than 35% of postdocs find tenure-track faculty positions, and many of those are teaching positions—not the research positions for which most postdocs train. We anticipate that the University would respond much more aggressively if, for example, the majority of medical residents could not find jobs for which they trained. We are calling on the University to institute a cohesive career planning program early in the postdoc experience.

But enhancing career development won't be our only focus. We hope to use the School of Medicine Faculty Senate to engage faculty and solicit their feedback. We will continue to highlight and celebrate outstanding mentors with the annual Mentoring Awards. We are working to build academic interactions among postdocs who work off campus, such as at the Veterans Affairs Hospital, where many postdocs feel intellectually isolated. Finally, we will be holding our Annual Survey, the most powerful tool that we have to advocate postdoc issues. So be sure to set aside a few minutes of your time to help us help you!

We hope that you continue to share our feeling that Stanford is an outstanding training environment, and we look forward to working with the administration and faculty to improve our training and to respond swiftly as important crises arise.

Happy Investigating,
Brandon Steelman and Will Grissom

SUPD Mentoring Award

The Stanford University Postdoctoral Association is pleased to announce that nominations for the 2009 Stanford Postdoctoral Mentoring Award will be accepted until April 24, 2009. The award aims to raise awareness of the importance of quality mentoring and will recognize faculty or scientific staff who are excellent mentors. Please nominate any Stanford University faculty member or scientific staff who has provided beneficial mentoring to you during your postdoctoral fellowship, they need not be your primary advisor. More information: www.stanford.edu/group/supd/award

Nomination deadline: Friday April 24, 2009
Award prize: \$2,500

Preparing Postdoctoral Scholars for Roles as Independent Scientists

Asha Pillai MD

The NIH has recently committed to increasing the number and diversity of clinician scientists trained in US academic centers. This is reflected in its concerted effort to increase awareness of career development awards (K08, K23, and the recently introduced K99/R00 pathways to independence). Despite these efforts most applicants continue to learn about their opportunities in a haphazard fashion. In fact, many Stanford research mentors have never guided a clinician scientist applicant. Perhaps due to this, many post-doctoral clinical fellows view the career development award merely as a funding mechanism, rather than as an educational program of successful career transition to independent scholarly activity. As a graduate of a Stanford clinical fellowship, I do believe that the clinical departments and divisions make efforts to provide career mentoring to their post-doctoral scholars. However, there is currently no focused or centralized mentorship program at our institution to assist clinical post-doctoral scholars into clinician scientist careers. Most successful scholars cite a need to locate guidance through a program focused on basic research (i.e. MSTP or MD/PhD programs). The unfortunate consequence of this is three-fold: 1) individuals with strong

*...there is currently
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centralized
mentorship program
at out institution...*

research capacities who have not chosen a “PhD pathway” program opt out of clinician scientist careers, thereby limiting the pool of active clinicians in translational research; 2) significant time is lost by inadequately prepared trainees in applying for awards for which they are unlikely to receive funding, or which does not match their long-range career goals; and 3) for those who do succeed in securing “K pathway” funding, perspectives of one’s responsibilities in research, collaboration, grantsmanship, mentorship, and leadership as an entering member of the academic community remains weak.

As a recent K08 career development award applicant, I believe our institution needs to better support the many different aspects needed to develop the kind of well-rounded researcher, academician, and future mentor that the NIH envisions. It is imperative that this vision be at least communicated to trainees before they reach the fellowship stage, and reviewed with them in detail during their first year of fellowship. This allows the motivated individual time to develop a coherent research plan, which can be further developed under the guidance of one or more research mentors.

The Stanford University Office of Postdoctoral Affairs (OPA) Scientific Management Series, which I recently attended, fulfils all of the above goals. Among the relevant topics covered are: research conduct, manuscript preparation, grantsmanship and subsequent faculty applications, interviewing (both as the interviewee and the interviewer), starting up a laboratory, mentoring, and what I call the “core management skills” which includes managing lab conflict, developing communication skills, and handling collaborations. These topics were addressed in the didactic sessions, as well as the interactive and informal discussion formats of the workshop sessions, using a systematic approach. The topics are covered in detail, under the guidance of faculty attuned to mentoring post-doctoral scholars. This gives the attendee a sense of confidence that he/she has been guided through the process by those with experience in these areas that new faculty will immediately face. This career development series also gives the research scholar the time and space to synthesize the information with his/her personal priorities, thus creating core skill sets that form the foundation for a successful career in scientific leadership. Since this course series was primarily developed by and for non-clinical postdoctoral scholars, I discussed with the OPA leadership some of the unique needs of clinical post-doctoral fellows.

SUPD

YES!! I'm a Stanford Postdoc...Now What?

What are the first steps you should take to get the most from your time here at Stanford? Besides getting your SUNet ID and figuring out where Peet's Coffee is. Should you start writing for funding right now even though you may currently be on a grant? How many papers should you expect to get from your work here? What should I expect from my mentor? What if I really don't want a career in research?

There are a lot of things to consider. Some you may not have thought of before. There are many resources available at Stanford (several listed below) to help navigate this transitional period. Whether you are just starting your postdoc or are in your fourth year, there are

please see Resources on page 4

SUPD on FaceBook & LinkedIn!

It's easy for postdocs to feel isolated as we toil away in the lab. But don't fear: two brave postdocs have created SUPD groups on popular networking sites. Elie Bursztein in Computer Science set up a group on the social networking site FaceBook, and Navaline Quach in Neurology set up a group on the professional networking site LinkedIn. We assume Facebook doesn't need an introduction, but some of you may not be familiar with LinkedIn, so Navaline put together a list of reasons to check it out. Thanks to Elie and Navaline for their initiative!

SUPD LinkedIn: Ten reasons to join

LinkedIn has become a great way to create a social and professional network. LinkedIn has grown to over 12 million users covering 147 industries. Here are 10 reasons to join the SUPD LinkedIn group.

1. Bridge the network of current, former or future alumni Postdocs at Stanford and stay in touch with Stanford community after your postdoctoral training.
2. Receive updated information about SUPD activities.
3. Share journal articles relevant to the Postdoc community.
4. Start discussions, ask questions or advice from your colleagues.
5. Help you find a job or find an employee.
6. Advertise yourself and let people know what your background and skills are with an updated profile.
7. Give your colleagues the opportunity to provide you with referrals.
8. Connect directly with colleagues who share similar interests and potentially find new collaborators or mentors.
9. Learn about career paths that former Stanford Postdocs in your specialty have taken.
10. Help the University follow up on Postdoc alumni careers, so that it can adapt its postdoctoral training or orientation program and give the best chances of success to its trainees.

Remember that good connections and current information are key for professional development. We hope that you will help us help you expand your own network of people, ideas and opportunities.

<http://www.linkedin.com> ("Search group" box: type "SUPD")

Preparing Postdocs cont.

We are in the process of developing strategies to address these needs. Among these:

1) Improved access of clinical fellows to OPA sponsored seminars during their busy clinical schedules; the (OPA) therefore plans to repeat these sessions in a well-publicized location accessible to the clinical scholars' primary work areas, likely within the main Stanford Hospital building.

2) Improved contact with junior faculty role models; An advisory group of individuals will collaborate with the Offices of the Dean of the School of Medicine, the Dean of Postdoctoral Affairs, and the Dean of Diversity and Leadership to enhance existing series and/or develop a new career mentorship series led by current research faculty or staff at Stanford who have been successful applicants for the NIH career development awards in the past ten years. Members of this faculty group will be approached about their interest in serving as career mentors to candidates who indicate an interest in clinician scientist careers at any point in their fellowship training.

3) Better input of the experiences of clinical fellows into educational efforts and policies governing postdoctoral scholars. Since policies are established or revised through the University Committee on Postdoctoral Scholars, which is staffed by OPA and includes representation of SUPD leaders, this could provide an avenue for inclusion of at least one clinician scientist fellow at Stanford during convening committee sessions, nationally at the National Postdoctoral Association, or the AAMC annual meetings. Involvement in these committees during research years will be beneficial by allowing clinical fellows' input to the post-doctoral policy process while preserving the focus on research career development. Deans Pizzo, Allen, and Valentine have expressed support for these goals and objectives. We look forward to advancing these ideas to the implementation stage soon. Stanford has always been centered on developing novel strategies to existing problems, through a "think-out-of-the-box" approach. It is my sincere hope that the efforts outlined above will further our pioneering spirit, and lead the way for other institutions to improve the mentorship process for clinical postdoctoral scholars.

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Preparing Postdocs cont.

* OPA is the centralized administrative organizational unit at Stanford that provides support for postdoctoral scholars and SUPD is the student branch of scholars at Stanford that provides advocacy and policy input for the student scholar population.

Asha Pillai is an Instructor in immunology, Department of Medicine, and was a post-doctoral research fellow in the Divisions of Hematology (Dept. of Medicine) and Pediatric Hematology/Oncology/BMT (Dept. of Pediatrics). She is currently funded by a K08 Career Development Award from the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI), and is actively working with the OPA to improve for clinician-scientist pathway scholars at Stanford.

Free Statistics Help!

The Department of Statistics offers a free, drop-in consulting service to members of the University community. Under the supervision of a senior faculty member, statistics doctoral candidates and experienced master's students provide assistance in areas including: Experimental design; Data analysis and interpretation of results; Model fitting; Time series; Classification and prediction. www-stat.stanford.edu/consulting/index.html

Resources cont.

steps you can take right now that will ensure you are competitive for the position you want when you leave here.

The answer to the question in the title “Now what?” is – take control. Your mentor can help you, the resources listed below can help you, even peers can and will help you. But ultimately, this is your career and mentors, resources, and peers won't always make sure you are being proactive. The time to shape your career is now!

- School of Medicine Career Center – med.stanford.edu/careercenter/ (will work with ALL postdocs)
- Office of Postdoctoral Affairs (OPA) – postdocs.stanford.edu
- Compact between postdoctoral appointees and their mentors – link found on OPA website.
- Career progress guidelines – link found on OPA website.

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