

## Postdoctoral General Status Survey Summary – October 2008

Total number of responses: **128**      Total Post docs at PSU University Park: **~350**

### GENERAL DEMOGRAPHICS

**Gender:** 44% female, 56% male

**Marital status:** 65% partnered, 35% single

**Age:** 21% aged 25-30 years, **56% aged 30-35 years**, 17% aged 35-40 years

**Children:** 32% have children (majority have 1-2 children, aged 5 and under), and 16% are planning to have a child during their time at PSU.

**Citizenship:** 62% non-US on temporary work visa (predominantly J-1, 49% or H-1B, 39%), 31% US citizen

**Ethnicity:** 56% White, 42% Asian; predominant countries were China and India

**Years since gained PhD:** <1 year 21%, 2 years 26%, 3 years 20%, 4 years 14%, 5+ years 19%

**Funding source:** majority of funding from PI (74%)

**Departmental affiliations:** Primarily from Biology, Physics, Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, Chemistry

**Salary:** The minimum PSU postdoc salary is \$34,668; most postdocs are paid at (34%) or above (52%) these guidelines. *However 14% are not receiving the minimum PSU salary.* The majority of postdocs are in favor of a salary scale (86%) and a salary minimum (88%). Nearly half (47%) of the postdocs surveyed do not feel that the PSU salary minimum is reasonable and 53% (combined strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree) feel that it is not adequate to cover expenses and provide for reasonable leisure activities.

**Postdoc experience/duration:** For 70% of postdocs, this is their first postdoc appointment. Of the 30% who have held a previous postdoc position, 17% have had 1 postdoc, 9% have had 2 and 4% have held 3 or more positions. The majority of postdocs have spent between 1 and 3 years as a postdoc (23%, 27% and 21% for 1, 2 and 3 years, respectively). 14% have spent 5+ years as a postdoc.

**Years of employment at PSU (as postdoc):** 81% have been at PSU for 0-3 years (combined); 74% anticipate being at PSU for another 1 (45%) -2 (29%) years. However, 23% do not know how long they will be employed as a postdoc at PSU.

## **CAREER DEVELOPMENT ISSUES**

**Training:** More than 50% would like to improve their training in the following areas: writing grants and papers, advancement of skills and career goals, teaching opportunities and mentoring (course design etc). Only 50% of postdocs are satisfied with the quality of their training at PSU, although most feel they have suitable access to equipment and facilities. 68% of postdocs are either satisfied or extremely satisfied with their PI.

**Mentors for Postdocs:** 50% of the postdocs surveyed do not have a mentor/mentor-like advisor, and 2/3 (66%) believe that this has had a negative effect on their research career. Of those who do have a mentor, 71% have described their supervisor or PI as their mentors, and believe that having a mentor has had a positive effect on their research career (91%). Notably, 63% feel that they need to have a mentor outside of their immediate lab or unit. Most believe that their mentor is accessible (good 49%, excellent 32%).

**Availability of PIs for discussion and review of progress:** 55% have weekly meetings with their PI to discuss their research, while 26% meet monthly and 18% daily. The survey also shows that 78% of the postdocs at PSU have not created Individual Development Plan (IDP) or a plan detailing the expectations of their projects. Only 8% have received an annual written performance evaluation.

**Active involvement of PIs:** Most postdocs are encouraged to present their work; 47% frequently, 40% sometimes (although 9% only rarely and 4% never), but only 43% are frequently provided with funding from the PI to defray expenses (39% sometimes, 7% rarely and 10% never). One-half of the community has no particular comment on whether their PI suggests names of colleagues to help with their research or job search, while 25% strongly agrees that they do.

**Grant Writing Experience:** Only about-a-third of the community (30%) have had any experience writing grant proposals as a PSU postdoc, while the rest remain to acquire such experiences.

**Assistance from Penn State in finding a job:** 32% of the postdocs who are currently looking for permanent jobs are receiving assistance

**Career Guidance Services:** 78% of the postdocs surveyed are not aware of career guidance services for postdocs on campus.

**Knowledge of Jobs/Positions:** The main source for learning of permanent positions was through professional networks (53%). Other sources are widely distributed; PI information, peer information, professional journal, online science clearinghouse, company job announcements.

**Employment objectives:** 70% would like to pursue a career in academia as their first choice and a second choice majority is shown among industry, government research, and non-profit organizations. The third choice is distributed among finance/venture capital, health or technology policy and scientific publishing.

### LIFESTYLE ISSUES

**Insurance / benefits:** Most postdocs take advantage of health (94%) and dental insurance (91%), and 47% have life insurance through the university. Most are satisfied or very satisfied with the coverage (55%), although 10% are dissatisfied or extremely dissatisfied.

**Retirement:** Most do not receive retirement benefits (53%), and many do not know (28%) if they do.

**Parental leave:** Nearly half of the postdocs surveyed do not know that they are eligible for parental leave (48%); only 19% correctly state that they are. Policy: *New Parent Accommodation for Graduate Assistants and Postdoctoral Trainees*.

**Housing:** Most postdocs surveyed did not get help finding housing (53%), only 33% did. Of those who received assistance, 61% asked for help, and 36% accepted help offered. Of those that received help, it was mostly from the PI (73%). If university-owned housing were available, a majority (57%) would use it, and 72% would use transitional housing (for a 2-3 week period while finding a house).

**Child care:** For those who placed their children in childcare, the costs ranged from \$100 to \$1000 per month, with an average of \$634. Comments also noted that on-campus childcare has very long waiting lists (a child registered before birth usually has to wait until age 2 or 3 to be accepted!).

**Reimbursement or Flexible payment account:** Only a small number receive a reimbursement account (17.5%), and many postdocs are unsure if they do (45.4%).