Finding a Good Postdoc: Tips & Resources

WHAT IS A POSTDOCTORAL ASSIGNMENT (POSTDOC)?

- Opportunity to develop additional skills and experience, while still under supervision of experienced researcher
- Doesn't need to be in field of Ph.D., but will be longer if requires becoming proficient in new field

PREPARING FOR A POSTDOC WHILE STILL IN GRADUATE SCHOOL:

- Present your work through departmental seminars and professional association meetings
- Supervise research of undergraduate students and technicians
- Participate in drafting research grant proposals
- Join professional associations and apply for honor societies in your field

SEARCHING FOR A POSTDOC:

- Network! Go to scientific meetings, talk with PIs whose research you like, make contacts.
- Present at and attend conferences and meetings; read professional association websites and newsletters
- Look to advisors for ideas and to advocate for you
- Email departments or deans of interest, even if positions aren’t posted. Be persistent, without being pushy

SELECTING A POSTDOC THAT EXCITES YOU:

Choice of a Postdoc Mentor: Consider special skills, rank, reputation, previous trainees, and funding status

- Established vs. New Principal Investigator (PI): Established PI has rank and influence, while new PI is likely to spend a lot of time in lab and can give more direct training
- Training Record: Are past trainees in high-level positions? Are current trainees getting quality training?
- Funding: Does PI have funding to pay postdoc for 3-5 years? Does PI have good extramural funding record?
- Management Style: Does the PI give postdocs freedom to work independently? What kind of schedule are postdocs expected to follow? Is the lab collaborative or competitive? Does PI supply up-to-date equipment?

Salary and Cost of Living

- Many Postdocs in academia have roughly same salary nationwide due to federal funding guidelines
- Postdocs in industry generally pay more, but may not be best choice for those pursuing academic careers because of potential limits on publishing and applying for funding

Select a Laboratory that Suits Your Work and Lifestyle

- If at all possible, visit the lab before making a decision; consider the reputation of the institution
- Talk to other graduate students and postdocs in lab to determine work style
- Think about how you like to work—as part of a team, individually, with what level of supervision?
- Does lab location and surrounding environment satisfy your non-work interests?
- Do people in lab work 9 a.m. – 5 p.m., only when experiments need to be done, or all of the time?
- Do you prefer a lab with a lot of money and space, or are tight spaces and budgets okay?
- Do you want a lab that acts like a “family” and hangs out all the time, or sticks to business?
- How much attention do you want from mentor? More people means less time with mentor

Select a Project with Outcomes that Match Your Career Goals

- Determine why you want to do a postdoc and what you want to do/where you want to be after completion
- Avoid strictly continuing work you did in graduate school. A postdoc is an opportunity to diversify your expertise
Think carefully before extending your graduate work into a postdoc in same lab. It is unlikely to maximize your gain of broader experience, but that can be offset by rapid and important publications.

- Does lab you are entering have a track record in producing high-quality publications?
- Strive to have at least 1 quality publication per year
- Have an understanding with your mentor on your likelihood of first authorship before you start projects
- Find out about source and duration of funding before accepting position
- Good mentors will understand that your horizon is independence—your own future lab, as a group leader, etc. 
- Strive to get your own money – plan ahead for this, as most funds come from joint application with mentor

MAXIMIZING YOUR POSTDOC EXPERIENCE:

Plan for Your Future

- Have at least two projects underway - include one that is guaranteed to generate good (if not exciting) results
- Network - Meet other postdocs on campus, serve on campus committees; Attend and present at seminars, and regional and national scientific meetings

LIST OF RESOURCES:

MIT Postdoc Resources

- Database on funding for research, travel, etc.: [http://web.mit.edu/cis/dbsearch.html](http://web.mit.edu/cis/dbsearch.html)
- MIT Biology Postdoc Information: [https://biology.mit.edu/postdoctoral](https://biology.mit.edu/postdoctoral)

Finding and Securing Postdoctoral Positions

- Finding Postdoctoral Positions: [http://www.grad.wisc.edu/education/gspd/careerplanning.html](http://www.grad.wisc.edu/education/gspd/careerplanning.html)

General Postdoc Resources and Opportunities

- Post-docs.com: [http://www.post-docs.com](http://www.post-docs.com)
- PhDs.org: [http://www.phds.org/postdoc](http://www.phds.org/postdoc)
- PostdocJobs.com: [www.postdocjobs.com](http://www.postdocjobs.com)

Maximizing the Postdoctoral Experience

- AAMC Compact Between Postdoctoral Appointees and Their Mentors: [http://www.aamc.org/postdoccompact](http://www.aamc.org/postdoccompact)
- Enhancing the Postdoctoral Experience for Scientists and Engineers: [http://books.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=9831#toc](http://books.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=9831#toc)

Funding Sources (awardee institutions, government agencies: NIH, NSF, NASA, EPA, USDA; & private organizations)
- Scientific Grants & Funding: [http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/funding](http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/funding)
- Resources on Funding & Proposal Development: [http://www.rsp.wisc.edu/preaward/index.html](http://www.rsp.wisc.edu/preaward/index.html)
- Funding for Individuals: [http://grants.library.wisc.edu/individuals/individuals.html](http://grants.library.wisc.edu/individuals/individuals.html)
- Tips on Applying for Burroughs Wellcome Funding (Biomedical Sciences): [http://www.bwfund.org/grant-programs/biomedical-sciences-1](http://www.bwfund.org/grant-programs/biomedical-sciences-1)
- Links on Grant Writing from UCSF: [https://accelerate.ucsf.edu/funding/grant-writing-guidance](https://accelerate.ucsf.edu/funding/grant-writing-guidance)
- Grant/Fellowship Databases: [http://www.med.upenn.edu/postdoc/funding.shtml#anchor101](http://www.med.upenn.edu/postdoc/funding.shtml#anchor101)
- Funding Your Research: How to Apply for an NRSA: [http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/careerservices/postdoc/nrsa.php](http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/careerservices/postdoc/nrsa.php)
- Fellowship applications & grant writing resources: [https://researchtraining.nih.gov/resources](https://researchtraining.nih.gov/resources)
- Scholarships through MIT: [http://gecd.mit.edu/go_abroad/fellowships/explore](http://gecd.mit.edu/go_abroad/fellowships/explore)