Survey of postdocs at Dartmouth College

Assessment of various issues for postdocs at Dartmouth College

December 2008
Survey methods:

Based upon the knowledge that the 142 postdocs were invited to participate in the survey

- 12/4/08 7:30 pm • Initial contact letter and survey link was sent to all known postdocs (based upon the names given by department administrators) at Dartmouth College

- 12/10/08 11am • Second letter/reminder and survey link was sent to all known postdocs at Dartmouth College

- 12/13/08 • Responses calculated. Percentage of total postdocs is calculated based upon a total of 142 postdocs at Dartmouth College. Percentage of survey respondents is calculated based upon the total number of survey respondents for each question. Analyzed results from survey monkey plotted according to the final numbers given by the program.
DCPDA recommendations

• Career development
  – There is a critical need to develop educational programming that endows postdocs with the tools they need to succeed within academia
  – Develop educational programming for postdocs interested in careers outside of academia
  – Although the DCPDA is involved with career development programming, we currently do not have adequate resources for development of more intensive symposia or multi-day workshops intended for larger postdoctoral audiences
  – Give postdocs more opportunity to teach
DCPDA recommendations

• Benefits/resources available
  – Ensure all postdocs are made aware of the resources available to them.
  – Work with HR to develop a postdoc-specific new employee orientation session.
  – Establish a system to ensure that postdocs are paid adequately for the amount of postdoctoral experience they have
DCPDA recommendations

• Create a centralized resource for postdocs to find job information, career resources, and guidance when dealing with various problems/issues

• Establish/generate a college-wide awareness of postdoctoral researchers
  – Standardize the professional titles of postdoctoral researchers
  – Establish communication with all departments and investigators by distributing postdoctoral handbook for new employees
Postdoctoral survey summary: Demographic information

- 37% (n = 53) of the entire postdoctoral population at Dartmouth College participated in the survey
- A majority of respondents only had 1-2 years postdoctoral experience
- 69% of respondents were titled “Research Associates A, B, or C”
- Broad range of departments represented, although a majority of respondents were from the Micro/Immuno department
- Mean age of survey respondents was 32.8 years
- 44% of respondents were women, while 56% were men
- 34% of respondents were U.S. citizens, while the rest held various visas (majority held J1 or H1B visas)
Total percentage/number of postdocs surveyed

- Responded to survey: 53 (37%)
- Did not respond to survey: 89 (62%)
Total years of postdoctoral experience for survey respondents

![Bar chart showing distribution of years of postdoctoral experience among survey respondents.]

Academic title of survey respondents

![Pie chart showing distribution of academic titles among survey respondents.]

Of survey respondents, there were no postdocs with the following academic titles:

1. Visiting Research Professor
2. Resident Fellow
3. Other

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 to 2</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 to 4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 to 6</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>6+</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

- **Research Associate A,B,C** (69.8%)
- **Postdoctoral Fellow** (28.3%)
- **Do not know** (1.9%)
Representative departments

Dartmouth institute health policy and clinical practice
Film and media
Tuck
Computer Science
Anthropology
Earth Science
Medicine
Math
Pharmacology
Physics
Biology
Chemistry
Biological Sciences
PBS
Genetics
Biochemistry
Physiology
Micro/Immuno

Number of respondents

0 2 4 6 8 10 12 14
Number of respondents

Age (Years)

Age range of survey respondents
Mean age = 32.8

Gender of survey respondents

(55.8%)
Residency status of survey respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Residency Status</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Application pending</td>
<td>(1.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanent resident</td>
<td>(11.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J1 Visa</td>
<td>(26.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H1B Visa</td>
<td>(24.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Citizen</td>
<td>(34%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Salary status of Dartmouth Postdocs

• **Large disparity in annual postdoc salary according to NIH recommendations and years of postdoctoral experience.**
  • Trend towards less salary/years experience
  • 80% of postdocs respondents with 1-2 years experience receive salaries above NIH standards
  • Approximately 60% of postdocs with 5-6 years experience receive salaries well below NIH standards

• There is no discrepancy between visa status and annual salary, with U.S. citizens and all international postdocs having a median salary in the range of 30-36K annually.
Salary distribution based upon total years of postdoc experience

* Minimum NIH postdoc salary guidelines
Do not wish to disclose
30-35K
36-40K
41-45K
46-50K
50+K

Salary distribution based upon residency status

% of respondents

Visa Status
Postdoctoral Training

• The experience that postdocs have had at Dartmouth have been overall very positive.
  – 67% of survey respondents have had a positive experience at Dartmouth

• 83% of respondents would recommend Dartmouth for a postdoc to their peers

• In terms of teaching and mentoring at Dartmouth, 87% welcome the opportunity, although only 50% have already been offered to do so.
  – Dartmouth could benefit from the will of postdocs to contribute to teaching/mentoring Dartmouth students.

• >50% of postdocs are receiving no training in career and professional development from their mentors
  – 85% lack training pertaining to transition from academia to industry
  – 73% are receiving no job search strategies

• Majority of postdoc expressed need for workshops targeting Academia (86% of respondents) and Industry (76%)
Q: How has your experience at Dartmouth been?

- Positive: 67.3%
- Neutral: 28.8%
- Negative: 3.8%

Q: Would you recommend Dartmouth for a postdoc to any of your peers?

- Yes: 83.7%
- No: 16.3%

() Denotes % of total respondents
Type of training postdocs feel they are receiving:

**Career Development**
- Yes: 15.4% (8)
- Somewhat: 38.5% (20)
- No: 46.2% (24)

**Transitioning from academia to industry**
- Yes: 15.7% (8)
- Somewhat: 31.4% (16)
- No: 52.9% (27)

**Obtaining funding/grant writing**
- Yes: 21.6% (11)
- Somewhat: 27.5% (14)
- No: 51% (26)

**Running an independent lab**
- Yes: 15.7% (8)
- Somewhat: 31.4% (16)
- No: 52.9% (27)

* Numbers in ( ) denote total number of respondents
Type of training postdocs feel they are receiving:

Teaching/mentoring:
- Yes: 15.4% (8)
- Somewhat: 36.4% (18)
- No: 50% (26)

Job search strategies:
- Yes: 5.9% (3)
- Somewhat: 21% (11)
- No: 72.5% (37)

* Numbers in ( ) denote total number of respondents
A majority of postdocs would like the opportunity to teach and/or mentor

- **Have had opportunity to teach/mentor**
  - Yes: (50%)
  - No: (37%)
  - Do not want more opportunity to teach/mentor: (13%)

() Denotes % of total respondents
Q: What could currently be done to make your time as a postdoc at Dartmouth more enjoyable and/or successful (mark all that apply)?

- More social contact with other postdocs (56%)
- Career development workshops designed to help postdocs get jobs in academia (86%)
- Career development workshops designed to help postdocs get jobs in industry (76%)
- Committee to help mediate disputes between your mentor and yourself (22%)
- A committee to help international postdocs transition to life in the U.S. (20%)

() Denotes % of total respondents
Job outlook

- Overall, job outlook for postdocs is negative
  - Only 19% of total respondents feel their chances of advancing in their chosen profession are excellent or good
  - Nearly 29% perceive their chances of advancing as challenging

- 40% of survey respondents are currently applying for jobs

- Positive though, as 69% of postdocs feel that they are adequately equipped with the tools to begin seeking employment
Q: How do you perceive your chances of advancing in your chosen profession after completion of your postdoc at Dartmouth?

* Numbers in ( ) denote total number of respondents
Q: Are you currently applying for jobs?

Q: Are you currently applying for jobs outside of U.S.?

() Denotes % of total respondents
Q: If you are applying for jobs, what types of jobs are you currently seeking? (mark all that apply)

- Academia (77.1%)
- Teaching (31.4%)
- Industry (51.4%)
- Consulting (22.9%)
- Government/public agency (11.4%)
- Other (2.9%)

() Denotes % of total respondents
Q: Do you feel that you are adequately equipped with the tools to begin seeking employment?

* Numbers in ( ) denote total number of respondents
Q: If you are currently applying for jobs, how could the DCPDA help?

- Mock job interviews
- Career fairs
- Facilitate application package review groups where post-docs can help each other revise their research and teaching statements
- A posting where postdocs and employers can connect to find available positions and applicants
- Hearing the experiences of those who have transitioned out of academia
- Links to job fairs in region
- Workshops on interviewing, writing resumes, CVs, cover letters
- Panels for international postdocs trying to find jobs in and outside of academia
Postdoc/Mentor relationship

- Generally positive between postdoc/mentor
- Most of survey respondents (59%) feel that they communicate well with their PI
- 61% of postdocs are satisfied with the amount of interaction they have with their mentor
- Respect and atmosphere in workplace, scientific freedom, number of publications, obtaining funding, learning new techniques, ability to attend conferences, and work life balance are all VERY important to survey respondents
Q: Do you feel that both you and your mentor communicate well regarding expectations of the work or project you are involved with?

(58.8%)

(31.4%)

(9.8%)

() Denotes % of total respondents
Q: Are you happy with the frequency of interaction with your mentor?

(60.8%) Yes
(29.4%) Somewhat
(9.8%) No

() Denotes % of total respondents
Q: Do you feel pressure to work most of your allotted vacation days/year?

- Yes: (30.8%)
- Somewhat: (30.8%)
- No: (38.5%)

() Denotes % of total respondents
Q: How important are the following?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very important</th>
<th>Somewhat important</th>
<th>Not important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listening and respect</td>
<td>41 (80.4%)</td>
<td>9 (17.6%)</td>
<td>1 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom with your project</td>
<td>37 (71.2%)</td>
<td>15 (28.8%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to teach/mentor</td>
<td>22 (42.3%)</td>
<td>26 (50%)</td>
<td>4 (7.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of publications</td>
<td>46 (88.5%)</td>
<td>6 (11.5%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obtaining your own funding</td>
<td>27 (51.9%)</td>
<td>23 (44.2%)</td>
<td>2 (3.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning new techniques</td>
<td>32 (61.5%)</td>
<td>20 (38.5%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atmosphere in workplace</td>
<td>43 (82.7%)</td>
<td>8 (15.4%)</td>
<td>1 (1.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to attend conferences/network</td>
<td>41 (78.8%)</td>
<td>11 (21.2%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work/life balance</td>
<td>38 (73.1%)</td>
<td>11 (21.2%)</td>
<td>3 (5.8%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Benefits/resources available

• Most postdocs are unaware of the resources they have available to them at Dartmouth

• A majority of postdocs have had concerns with salary and finding affordable housing (58% and 53% respectively)

• Of postdocs who have had issues at Dartmouth, most of them were unsure about who they could contact to help solve problems

• Only 16% of postdocs feel that they have adequate access to facilities at Dartmouth
Q: How important are the following?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very important</th>
<th>Somewhat important</th>
<th>Not important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Salary</td>
<td>35 (67.3%)</td>
<td>15 (28.8%)</td>
<td>2 (3.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits</td>
<td>44 (84.6%)</td>
<td>5 (9.6%)</td>
<td>3 (5.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allotted vacation time</td>
<td>29 (55.8%)</td>
<td>18 (34.6%)</td>
<td>5 (9.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusting to life as a postdoc</td>
<td>23 (44.2%)</td>
<td>22 (42.3%)</td>
<td>7 (13.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>27 (52.9%)</td>
<td>19 (37.3%)</td>
<td>5 (9.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child care</td>
<td>21 (42.9%)</td>
<td>13 (26.5%)</td>
<td>15 (30.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercise facilities</td>
<td>22 (42.3%)</td>
<td>19 (36.5%)</td>
<td>11 (21.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postdoctoral training</td>
<td>41 (80.4%)</td>
<td>9 (17.6%)</td>
<td>1 (2%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q: Have you had concerns with any of the following? (mark all that apply)

- Salary (57.8%)
- Benefits (42.2%)
- Time off (31.1%)
- Visa/immigration issues (28.9%)
- Tax issues (20%)
- Finding affordable housing (53.3%)
- Child care (24.4%)
- Training received (35.6%)
- Conflict with mentor (13.3%)
- Conflict with co-workers (22.2%)
- Other (8.9%)

() Denotes % of total respondents
Q: Would you know where to go if you had any of the previous problems?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Survey respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>(21.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>(48.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>(30.8%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

() Denotes % of total respondents
Q: Do you feel that you have adequate access to facilities, events, and/or services here at Dartmouth (e.g. the pottery studio, woodworking shop, jewelry shop, etc.)?

(16.7%)  
(45.8%)  
(37.5%)  

() Denotes % of total respondents
Q: How many vacation days do you have/year?

Survey respondents

- 0-7D: 5.8%
- 8-14D: 23.1%
- 14-21D: 26.9%
- 21+D: 9.6%
- Do not know: 34.6%

() Denotes % of total respondents
General comments from survey respondents

• It would be great if the many facilities and services available to me as a postdoc were clearly explained to me. Perhaps a welcome kit might help.
• More career guidance concerning careers outside academia.
• Retirement benefits for postdocs on fellowships.
• I would like to know more about the "how to"s of job search particularly for non-traditional science jobs. Also funding and fellowship opportunities are often limited for post-docs who are non-US citizens. More information in these areas (in the form of speakers/web resources) would be helpful.
• Assisting in the transition in and out of Dartmouth would allow us to focus more on the jobs we have come to Dartmouth to do.
General comments continued

• If postdocs were able to attend to events organized for Grad Students.
• Most institutions in areas with high cost of living (and some areas without high costs) provide supplementary stipends to offset the cost of housing, etc. This assistance, in the form of housing stipend, child care stipend, or subsidized dependent health benefits, would be very helpful and desirable for prospective postdocs interested in Dartmouth.
• Provide lots of career development seminars and workshops.
• Having a free gym membership as the graduate students do may help ease costs of living.
• Can postdocs use the woodshop, pottery studio, etc?