Dartmouth College Postdoctoral Association (DCPDA)

January 2010
Survey
The purpose of this survey was to assess the relevance and effectiveness of the DCPDA career development programs, in addition to identifying relevant issues/concerns of postdocs at Dartmouth College.

The overarching goal of the DCPDA is to give all postdocs the opportunity to succeed according to their individual wants and needs. Well into our second year, are now in a position to begin to approach the administration regarding significant concerns and issues that Dartmouth postdocs face on a daily basis. In order to effectively implement significant change towards the College’s regulations governing how postdocs are insured, paid, and treated in general, we need the numbers and data to support our agenda.
Methods

The survey questions were collected using SurveyMonkey: http://www.surveymonkey.com

The survey was first announced on January 18th 2010 via blitz mail to 196 postdocs*, and remained open until February 4th 2010. Several reminders were sent out during this time, and an announcement was communicated twice via Dartmouth Daily Updates and also was posted on the official DCPDA website.

* Dartmouth does not have an institutional definition for postdoc, but HR is able to provide DCPDA with a list of Research Associates and Fellows. Not all of these are postdocs, but are PhDs in more permanent non-faculty positions. In addition to the HR list, self-identified postdocs have been added upon request.

The current list contains 196 current blitz mail accounts. 63 (32%) responded to survey

Written up by Kristine Hill and Anwesha Nag, February 2010
Summary and Demographics

• 63 postdocs responded to the survey (46% male, 54% female)
• 50.7% (32/63) of respondents are either US citizens or permanent residents.
• HR titles are Research Associate A, B or C, or Research Fellow.
• 92.1%(58) of respondents were from the science. Of the remainder, 1 was from humanities and 4 from social sciences.

• 35/57 (61%) of respondents have salaries in or above the NIH recommended scale.
• 19/23 (83%) of respondents with 2 yrs or less experience were within the NIH salary scale.
• 14/29 (48%) of respondents with over 2yrs experience were within the NIH salary scale.

• The primary source of funding for 64.5% of respondents is a mentor's grant awards.
• Greater than 90% of respondents salaries come from external (non-Dartmouth funds).

• 45% (34) of respondents choose a tenure track professorship, with a primary focus on research, as their career goal. Other career paths included industry, clinical, and education.

• 6.3%(4) respondents considered their chances of obtaining their desired job as excellent, and 34.9% (33) judged it to be fair to good. 28.6% (18) said it would be challenging.

• In terms of the postdoc-mentor relationship, the majority of postdocs who responded to the survey were happy with their level of training.

• Major concerns expressed by respondents pertain to either salary and benefits, training received, or the status of postdoc at Dartmouth. The treatment of Research Fellows, who bring their own funding to Dartmouth was a major issue.

• 33.3% (21) respondents said that they were unaware of the resources available to them at DCAL, despite having been here for over a year. 15.9% (10) were unaware of DCPDA's existent, despite having been at Dartmouth over a year. 76.1% (35) respondents claimed to have learnt about DCPDA by blitz.

• Respondents rated Career development workshops as being the most important area for DCPDA to continue to focus on.

• 98% of respondents not involved in DCPDA expressed an interest in participating in at least some DCPDA sponsored events.

• 27% (14) respondents teach or co-teach a course at Dartmouth, and 84.6% (44) mentor Dartmouth students. However, 87.1% (54) would like more opportunities teach and mentor.
Training and career development:
• Career workshops organized by DCPDA have been well appreciated over the last year. A majority of the survey respondents recognize these events organized by DCPDA are of importance to them. Therefore this should continue to be a major area of effort by DCPDA.
• Post-docs interested in joining industry have fewer resources available to them. More efforts need to be channeled towards helping them achieve their career aspirations.
• Additionally DCPDA need to continue to organize workshops on pursuing career in academia. Some events are not easily accessible to post-doc working at the Cancer Centre. We recommend some relevant career development events being organized at the Cancer Centre.
• It should be made clear to the faculty-advisor hiring post-docs that professional training and opportunities are part of post-doctoral training.
• More (paid) teaching opportunities should be created for post-docs in sciences who would like to pursue a career in teaching.

The position of postdoc needs to be defined and formally recognized by Dartmouth, and DCPDA recommends the following (from the National Postdoc Association):
“A postdoctoral scholar ("postdoc") is an individual holding a doctoral degree who is engaged in a temporary period of mentored research and/or scholarly training for the purpose of acquiring the professional skills needed to pursue a career path of his or her choosing.”

Salary and benefits:
• Dartmouth should follow the lead of other institutions and implement minimum postdoc salaries, using the NIH recommended scale as a guide: http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-10-047.html
• Healthcare cost and quality and parental leave is an issue for the post-doctoral fellows and the benefits should be at par with other college employees. This disparity discourages post-doc from obtaining their own fellowship. Fellowships offered to individuals benefit the college financially and therefore the fellows should be offered at least the same benefits as other post-docs.
• Dental insurance cost is too high for all post-docs and the college needs to subsidize the costs.
• Healthcare cost deduction should be made pre-tax
• Gym fees should be subsidized.
• Guaranteed and discounted childcare programs should be offered to post-docs.
• Better retirement plan for post-docs. There should be no vesting on their retirement plan.

DCPDA recommends that Dartmouth look to Yale Universities Office of Postdoctoral Affairs an example to follow: http://www.yale.edu/postdocs/postdocs.html
Salary range in terms of years postdoctoral experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of experience</th>
<th>*NIH scale</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>**Dartmouth</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>$37,740</td>
<td>9/11</td>
<td>(over 36K)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>$39,756</td>
<td>11/12</td>
<td>(over 36K)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>$42,624</td>
<td>4/9</td>
<td>(over 41K)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>$44,304</td>
<td>6/11</td>
<td>(over 41K)</td>
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<td>2/5</td>
<td>(over 45K)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>$47,940</td>
<td>0/5</td>
<td>(over 45K)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>$49,836</td>
<td>4/4</td>
<td>(over 41K)</td>
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</table>

Total: 36/57 (63%)


**Number of Dartmouth postdocs in or near the NIH recommended range
Primary source of funding

N = 62

- PI Grant: 40
- Personal Grant: 3
- Fellowship: 10
- Dartmouth: 6
- Other: 3
Residence status

- 44.4% (28) US Citizen
- 25.4% (16) Permanent Resident
- 22.2% (14) H1B Visa
- 6.3% (4) J1 Visa
- 1.6% (1) Application pending
- Other (please specify)

% Respondents (number)
What is your Human Resources (HR) title?

*Other* = Research Associate, Senior Researcher
Your field of research is in the:

- Sciences: 92.1% (58)
- Humanities: 1.6% (1)
- Social Sciences: 6.3% (4)
Other
Clinical x2
Career in research, some teaching
Having my own lab, not necessarily as a professor
Involvement in global health and non-profit organizations
How do you perceive your chances of obtaining your desired job after completion of your postdoc?

- Excellent: 18
- Good: 15
- Fair: 18
- Challenging: 8
- Don’t know: 4
In terms of your postdoc-mentor relationship, how would you rate your current level of training or the support you receive in the following areas:

- Listening/respect
- Freedom with your project
- Opportunity to mentor during postdoc tenure
- Opportunity to teach during postdoc tenure
- Participation in outreach activities
- Number of publications
- Obtaining your own funding
- Learning new techniques
- Atmosphere in the workplace
- Ability to freely and openly discuss your project

% Respondents

- Unacceptable
- Acceptable
- Excellent
- Not Important
In terms of your postdoc-mentor relationship, how would you rate your current level of training or the support you receive in the following areas:

- Listening/respect: 3.2
- Freedom with your project: 3.2
- Opportunity to mentor during postdoc tenure: 2.8
- Opportunity to teach during postdoc tenure: 1.7
- Participation in outreach activities: 2.1
- Number of publications: 2.4
- Obtaining your own funding: 2.4
- Learning new techniques: 3.4
- Atmosphere in the workplace: 3.1
- Ability to freely and openly discuss your project: 3.4

Rating (Maximum = 4)
How would you rate the training you are currently receiving at Dartmouth for the following:

- Access to career development workshops
- Regular feedback from your PI/Mentor
- Information on transitioning from academia to industry
- Obtaining independent funding (fellowships)
- Learning about running an independent laboratory/research facility
- Teaching/mentoring experience
- Publishing your research
- Presenting your data at conferences
- Acquiring managerial/administrative skills

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Rating (Maximum = 3)
Are you satisfied with the benefits and resources available for postdocs at Dartmouth?

- Definitely: 58.7% (37)
- Somewhat: 23.8% (15)
- Somewhat: 17.5% (11)
- No: 5.2% (3)

% Respondents (number)
Comments concerning postdoc salary and benefits

1. No maternity leave, retirement, or dental for fellows
2. Salary
3. Health care is substandard compared to other universities
4. Limited benefits for fellows
5. Salary is too low
6. My biggest issue is confusion between Research associate and fellows...and why they should be different at all. Also, I worry about the fact that postdocs aren't a very visible/perceived as important party of Dartmouth College
7. Dental, parental leave
8. Health and Dental insurances are still pricey
9. The cost of health and dental insurance
10. HR benefits; not being able to roll over 401K in < 3yrs; not being treated like a regular employee.
11. It seems that fellowship tax deductions for health insurance are post-tax, so I am receiving in effect less real dollars; also, the year of fellowship doesn't count toward divestment in the retirement plan
12. Age discrimination practices applied to retirement contributions
13. I do not have full benefits, like the right to have a dependent care account for my daughter.
14. That we are underpaid compared to what NIH recommends as a salary for
15. Postdocs.
16. Gym, health care when I receive a fellowship from outside the school
17. POOR HEALTHCARE, NO MEANINGFUL RAISES, NO HOUSING ASSISTANCE
18. I would love to earn more money.
19. Dartmouth seems unprepared to deal with post-doctoral fellows with their own funding
20. More help with VISA/TAX issues and Housing would be appreciated
21. If on fellowship, no retirement benefits; no flexible spending
22. Subsidized day (child) care, free fitness center
23. We have no access to good healthcare or retirement plans
24. Pay to much health care (for a family, around 300$/month) for such low income
What are your greatest concerns or issues?

Comments concerning postdoc training and career development

1. Training - making it clear that professional training and opportunities are a defined part of this position, as it is for graduate students and faculty. Clarification
2. between being a postdoc and being a technician.
3. The rights and duties of a postdoc must be made clear to BOTH the postdoc and advisor, and more importantly, the duties of the advisor as a mentor need to be made clear to the professors.
4. Recognition of intellectual contributions of postdocs is a serious issue which is rarely discussed.
5. No teaching opportunities for scientists
6. The postdoc is a training position and salary is not commensurate with education or experience,
7. Dartmouth needs to ensure postdocs are receiving the training they deserve. Dartmouth needs to take more responsibility to ensure that its faculty does not take advantage of new PhDs. The career development needs of postdocs are more akin to those of graduate students and assistant professors than employees and administrate needs to clearly define the "postdoc" as being distinct from a regular employee. Dartmouth does not have a minimum salary or care that many of its postdocs are falling below the NIH recommended scale.
8. hard to get admin support since "post-doc" not recognized
9. postdoc resources (not surprisingly) aimed at sciences, not social sciences
10. It is hard to access a lot of the resources and benefits (ie. attend sessions) over at the campus when doing scientific research at the cancer center. It makes it hard to attend a lot of events.
11. More availability to resources related to career development and options for nontraditional Tracks
12. Difficulties to get the information I want
13. not enough work space and need better work atmosphere
14. Small research community.
15. Lack of a career development center.
16. The postdoc association is doing a great job in promoting career, grant writing, teaching etc workshops. Until they came along I did not have any ideas on what’s available and how to get involved.
17. resources are lacking for individuals who intend to join the industry and not academia after postdoc experience
18. Learning about running an independent laboratory
Are you aware that Dartmouth Center for the Advancement of Learning (DCAL) offers career development workshops?

- **No**: 12.7%
- **Yes, I knew before coming to Dartmouth**: 3.2%
- **Yes, I learned <2 months after arrival**: 33.3%
- **Yes, But I had been here >2 months**: 17.5%
- **Yes, But I had been here >6 months**: 33.3%
When did you first learn about DCPDA?

- Prior to coming to Dartmouth: 4.8% (3)
- <1 month of establishment or arrival at Dartmouth: 30.2% (19)
- 1-6 months: 20.6% (13)
- 6-12 months: 28.6% (18)
- >1 yr: 15.9% (10)
How did you first learn about DCPDA?

Blitz: 7.9% (5)
Web: 4.8% (3)
DCAL: 1.6% (1)
This survey: 1.6% (1)
Pamphlet: 28.6% (18)
Your PI: 15.9% (10)
D2U: 63% (4)
Other postdocs:
Other:
Have you participated in any of the following DCPDA sponsored events?

- Career Development Workshops: 35%
- Travel Award Competition: 8%
- First Monday Socials: 18%
- Social Events: 16%
How important is it to you that DCPDA focuses on the following areas in the future?

- Career development workshops for...
- More opportunity to teach and/or mentor
- More social contact with other postdocs
- Travel award sponsorship
- More opportunity to scientifically network
- Information regarding issues specific to...
- Committee to help mediate disputes between...
- Provide information regarding the rights and...
- Development of a committee to advocate for...

% Respondents

- Unacceptable
- Acceptable
- Excellent
- Not Important
How important is it to you that DCPDA focuses on the following areas in the future?

- Rating (Maximum = 3)
  - Career development workshops for... (2.5)
  - More opportunity to teach and/or mentor (2.0)
  - More social contact with other postdocs (1.8)
  - Travel award sponsorship (1.7)
  - More opportunity to scientifically network (1.7)
  - Information regarding issues specific to... (1.6)
  - Committee to help mediate disputes between... (1.3)
  - Provide information regarding the rights and... (2.2)
  - Development of a committee to advocate for...
How would you characterize your involvement with DCPDA?

- **No interest**: 43.5% (27)
- **Might be interested in participating in certain events**: 4.8% (3)
- **Definitely interested in participating in certain events**: 17.7% (11)
- **Might be interested in taking a leadership role**: 1.6% (1)
- **Definitely interested taking a leadership role**: 32.3% (20)
- **I am or have been actively involved in leadership**:
During your time as a Dartmouth postdoc have you (choose all that apply):

- Taught a Dartmouth Course: 5.8% (3)
- Co-taught: 21.2% (11)
- TA'd: 7.7% (4)
- Mentored/supervised Dartmouth students research: 84.6% (44)
- Outreach activities: 9.6% (5)
- Attended DCAL workshops: 57.7% (30)
Would you like more teaching opportunities and/or mentoring experience?

- Definitely: 58.1% (36)
- Somewhat: 29.0% (18)
- Somewhat: 12.9% (8)
- No: 0% (0)

% Respondents (number)
Do you serve, or have you served on any committees or boards at Dartmouth College or DHMC?

95.2% (55) Yes

4.8% (3) No

% Respondents (number)
Do you serve as a volunteer for any organizations outside of Dartmouth?

- Yes: 27.4% (17)
- No: 72.6% (45)

% Respondents (number)
Additional Respondent Comments:

• Given that NIH recommended minimum salary are not enforced at Dartmouth, it would be nice if the college offered post-docs incentives that made up the financial difference. For example, FREE membership to the fitness center, guaranteed and discounted child-care programs.

• I am sorry I do not have time to be more involved in the organization however I think you guys do a great job!

• POSTDOCS SHOULD HAVE MORE OF A ROLE IN THEIR OWN GOVERNANCE.

• Paid teaching opportunities for science postdocs, so we don't have to adjunct at other institutions

• DCPDA is doing a great job. Thanks you all for taking the initiative.

• I think it's great that there will be two socials a month instead of one and on different days on the week. The only suggestion from a scientific research standpoint is that DCPDA events be held at times 6:30pm or later (socials), or first thing in the morning for the career development sessions (8-9am?). Due to research I've had to miss out on so many events because of scheduling.