A Conversation with Debbie Mattina, Assistant Director of Faculty Affairs for Postdoctoral and Research Appointments

Tell us about yourself and your work at the Faculty Affairs Office.

I’ve been working in the Office of Faculty Affairs (OFA) for almost fourteen years, and my projects and areas of responsibility have changed over time. Currently, I work on non-faculty appointments, including postdocs. My co-workers and I review and process all paperwork for postdoc appointments, coordinate workshops and programs for postdocs, handle benefits questions, work with administrators throughout the school on faculty and non-faculty appointments, produce various data reports, and work on other projects as is needed. I also work with colleagues at various university offices, and with postdoc administrators at the Medical School and Harvard-affiliated hospitals.

How did you get where you are today? Can you share some highlights of your experience with us?

My educational background and degrees are in education, so working for an educational institution like Harvard was a good fit for me. In addition to the administrative work I do in OFA, I have taught English to adults for many years. I’ve enjoyed the flexible schedule I’ve been able to arrange in OFA and have been able to take time off to travel, teach, and study in Mexico, Central America, and South America. I’ve tried to use what I’ve learned from these experiences in the postdoc English communications class that we hold each fall and spring.
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I never expected to stay in the same office and position for so long, but have worked with amazing people at HSPH. This includes the school’s postdocs and the PDA Council members with whom I’ve always enjoyed working. I’m impressed with how hard postdocs work and with the dedication of the Council members to improving the postdoc experience for all HSPH postdocs.

Can you give a few tips for a successful postdoctoral experience at HSPH?

Over the years, I’ve learned about the importance of mentorship for postdocs. A good mentor who is supportive and fosters his/her postdoc’s professional development is essential for a successful postdoc experience. In addition, postdocs who are able to take initiative and be proactive in seeking out opportunities to expand their skills and knowledge and collaborate with other scientists are more successful . . . and happier.

Who are we?
The HSPH Postdoctoral Association (PDA) was founded in May 2007 by a group of HSPH postdocs. The purpose of the PDA is to enhance the postdoc experience by providing opportunities for postdocs to develop their careers through relevant workshops and seminars, to network at postdoc gatherings, to provide support and collaboration with each other, and of course, to socialize! For more information, please access http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/pda/

For more information on resources provided by the Office of Faculty Affairs, visit: www.hsph.harvard.edu/faculty-affairs/
January 2013

POST DOC POST

Postdoc Workshops and Events

January 30 - May 8, 2013
Postdoc Peer-Review Writing Group
(meeting every other week)
1:30–3:20 PM; Kresge 212
Donald Halstead

February 5, 2013
Effective Teaching (part 2)
11:00 AM–12:30 PM; Kresge 204
Nancy Kane

February 13, 20, and 27, 2013
Jmp (statistical software) Workshop
2:00–3:30 PM; Kresge 213
Amy Cohen

March 7, 2013
Grant Workshop - NIH Overview and Peer Review System
9:00–10:30 AM; FXB G-13
Karen Emmons

March 21 - May 9
Postdoc English Communications Course
(8 sessions)
4:30–6:30 PM; FXB G-11
Debbie Mattina

March 26 - May 14, 2013
Postdoc Scientific Writing Course
(7 sessions)
12:30–2:20 PM; Kresge 204
Donald Halstead

April 4, 2013
Grant Workshop - NIH Funding Mechanisms
1:00–2:30 PM; FXB G-12
Karen Emmons

April 17, 2013
Essentials of Grant-Writing
12:30–2:20 PM; Kresge 502

March 19, 2013
Postdoc Orientation
9:30–11:00 AM; Kresge 204
Debbie Mattina & PDA

Please register with Faculty Affairs (facultyaffairs@hsph.harvard.edu) for all workshops
An Interview with Professor Joseph Brain, Chair of the PDA Advisory Council

Professor Brain, the Cecil K. and Philip Drinker Professor of Environmental Physiology, met with the Postdoc Post recently to discuss the importance of postdocs at HSPH and ways to generate more recognition for our role in the School.

Postdoc Advisory Council

When asked to assume the role of faculty adviser for the Postdoc Association (PDA) Advisory Council, Professor Joseph Brain happily accepted the position. The PDA Advisory Council is an elected subgroup of faculty whose purpose is to optimize how postdocs can contribute to the school community, to graduate students, and to their mentors.

“I think the importance of postdocs has been underestimated for decades.”

In the past, the needs of postdocs were not always adequately addressed at HSPH. Professor Brain has always been an advocate of postdocs and believes in their work. He said that the most distinguished alumni in the Department of Environmental Health’s Molecular and Integrative Physiological Sciences (MIPS) Program during the last four decades have often been postdocs, not degree candidates. They have done extremely well; some have become department chairs and others have gained international fame. In terms of his own research and publications, as well as receiving grants, there is no doubt in Professor Brain’s mind that postdocs are incredibly important. He believes this is also true for the department
An Interview with Professor Joseph Brain, Chair of the PDA Advisory council

and the entire school. Taking away the contributions of the postdocs would have an enormous negative impact on faculty’s careers, their productivity, and the grants they receive.

Expanding the reach of the PDA and postdocs at HSPH

Professor Brain suggested ways to expand the reach of the PDA. One way is to have research associates become involved given their proximity to postdocs. A second way is for postdocs to be recognized for their role in mentoring graduate students (who usually want to pursue postdocs of their own). Professor Brain suggested this could happen during seminars in which postdocs discuss pertinent issues, such as choosing the right mentor and teaching opportunities. Mentoring can also occur during the time when graduate students contribute to postdocs’ research. This presents an opportunity for postdocs to teach students up-to-date skills their faculty mentors may not possess. Gaining skills in mentorship would benefit postdocs, who may soon need to provide mentorship in faculty positions.

Important areas for postdoc training

Professor Brain outlined important areas for postdoc training. He suggested that gaining experience with grant writing should be an important goal for postdocs. Future employers value this skill; they want to know that candidates can generate resources. It is also key for postdocs to be able to design and execute their own experiments. Ideally, a postdoc’s mentor should be able to state in a letter of recommendation that a postdoc generated his or her own research ideas and produced some independent projects. This is highly desired by future employers.
PDA Announcements

Seeking a Webmaster

The Postdoctoral Association (PDA) maintains an informational and dynamic website hosted by the Harvard School of Public Health: http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/pda/. The PDA is now seeking an enthusiastic postdoc to periodically update the association’s website. No major programming skills required! If you can fill in a website form and edit a word document, then you are the webmaster!

For additional information or inquiries for the position please email: acaban@hsph.harvard.edu

PDA Merchandise Competition

Design our slogan and win!

Do you love design? Have a knack with words? Love to get creative? The PDA is organizing some “postdoc” themed merchandise for HSPH postdocs, and we want your help!

What: Design a slogan or logo for our merchandise competition

Why: Winning entry receives a $50 COOP gift card (and the glory!)

How: Send your entry to alampard@hsph.harvard.edu

When: Enter by February 15th, 2013
PDA Pub Night

What: Come along and meet your fellow postdocs. We are a super friendly bunch!

Where: Jerry Remy’s, 1265 Boylston St., Fenway

When: Thursday, February 7th at 6pm

Free appetizers provided!!
The PDA holiday party was held in December, with over 60 postdocs in attendance. The free lunch and refreshments were enjoyed by all. The PDA announced the 2012 Travel Award winners. We congratulate Shilpa Bhupathiraju, Andrej Trauner, and Zhong-wei Jia for their well deserved win.
Before the holiday break last year, HSPH postdocs enjoyed a mixer with postdocs from around Boston and Cambridge, including MIT, MGH, HMS, Beth Israel, and Children’s Hospital. Over 140 postdocs attended, making it a great event! The PDA looks forward to organizing similar events in the future.