Postdoc Salaries: Advocating for Livable Wages

by Aisha S. Dickerson, PDA VP of Advocacy

Recently new standards under the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) increased the minimum salary for postdoctoral fellows from $23,660 to $47,476. These pay rates are nationwide, but $47,476 will go much farther in many cities than it will in Boston, where the median household income was $78,800 in 2015, housing is more than 2.5 times more expensive, and the overall cost of living is 40% greater.

If minimum salary was adjusted for location, postdocs in Boston would get paid at around $66,466.

Additionally, as the age of postdocs is also the common age for starting families, the cost of childcare in Boston (average of $1,422/month) can quickly consume the minimum postdoc monthly salary of $3,957 (See Figure). Results of a recent survey to HSPH postdocs revealed:

A large number of Postdocs and Research Associates (40%) have children.

Several have expressed concerns about their ability to continue training on the miniscule salary provided.

“My need for childcare had/has a very direct impact on a) my decision to accept a position, and b) how long I am able to stay in that position before I will need to consider other options.”

The HSPH PDA is advocating for higher salaries with the following recommendations to the administration:

1. A standard minimum postdoc salary of $53,000 with a 4% increase per year of experience and annual adjustment for inflation for all future grant proposals.

2. The Office of Sponsored Programs should have a standard paragraph for inclusion in all future grant budget justifications to readily explain the need to meet higher living costs in the Boston area.

3. Administration should allocate a portion of endowment funds to supplementing the salaries of postdocs on NIH training grants.

4. HSPH should provide childcare subsidies for at least one child to increase recruitment and retention of a more diverse community of academic appointees.

Harvard should not only set the bar in research and education, but should also be a leader for proper treatment of all members of its community, including postdoctoral fellows.
Remarks from the PDA President

Dear colleagues,

It has been a joy and a pleasure to serve as the PDA President over the past three years.

We have accomplished so much over these years. Our Public Health 101 Nanocourse program grows rapidly—the 25 nanocourses help fulfill our need for more teaching experience while serving as a resource to over 1500 students, researchers, and professionals within and beyond Harvard.

We have also improved our involvement in the school’s agenda on diversity and inclusion through our participation in the Dean’s Advisory Committee on Diversity and Inclusion and our efforts for increased salary and benefits.

In addition, in the past three years, our colleague Dr. Mudit Chaand has served as the Council’s Social Chair. His work has revolutionized the way postdocs and research associates connect and network through monthly social events.

Through these measures, we have successfully created a better learning environment, enhancing the training of HSPH postdocs in more than research, but inclusive of career development and networking skills.

The PDA Council has continued to advocate for an increase in the school’s minimum postdoc salary and has been meeting with administrators in hopes that we can start transitioning into a policy inclusive of livable wages for postdoctoral fellows.

Join us in creating a better experience for postdocs and research associates at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health!

In Community,

Christian Suharlim, MD, MPH

2017 Poster Day

by Freeman Suber, PDA General Council Member

The Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health had its third annual Poster Day on April 26th. The PDA and Student Association sponsored this event with the support of the Office of Faculty Affairs and Dean Michelle Williams.

This year’s competition had the highest participation thus far, with a total of 74 abstracts included. This was the first year that practice posters were included with the traditional research poster format.

Of the six awards given, the audience participation award was added as a new category. The winners were:

**Best Overall:** Paola Abril Campos Rivera – “Experiences of street harassment and associations with perceptions of social cohesion among women in Mexico City” (31)

**Audience Favorite:** Laila Al-Shaar – “Weight change, BMI, and mortality among survivors of myocardial infarction: Analysis of two prospective US cohort studies” (73)

**Best Postdoc/Research Associate:** Lindsay Kobayashi – “Childhood deprivation and later-life cognitive function in a population-based study of older rural South Africans” (22)

**Best Student:** Vidit Munshi “Risk-based Adaptive Screening for Cervical Cancer” (61)

**Honorable Mention, Student:** Lacey Gibson – “A different kind of bread: Discrimination and exclusion as barriers to the right to health of Roma women in Marseille” (1)

**Poster Day image contest winners:** Laurence Bernard (front cover) & Dilpreet Singh (back cover)

**Dean Williams and PDA President, Christian Suharlim, pose with Poster Day winners**

You can find the winning abstracts and more in the 2017 Poster Day abstract book located at www.hsph.harvard.edu/posterday
Travel Awards

by Dania Valvi, Vice President of External Affairs

The PDA provided one travel award last fall and two this spring: the Fall Travel Awards, the Spring Travel Award, and The Kocaeli International Travel Award.

The Kocaeli Travel Award is sponsored by Kocaeli University Medical School to allow three Postdocs and Research Associates to spend one week in Turkey engaged in consulting, teaching, organization of seminars and/or workshops and mentoring. Of the 7 applications submitted, winners of the 2017 award were:

1. Dania Valvi, Environmental Health
2. Jani Saksi, Genetics and Complex Diseases
3. Scott Olesen, Epidemiology and Immunology and Infectious Diseases

The PDA Spring Travel Award is designed to provide support to three Postdocs and one Research Associate to attend a scientific conference with up to $1500 each.

For the Fall Travel Award, we received 19 applications from postdocs and 5 from research associates. The winners were:

1. Souzana Achilleos, Environmental Health: “Composition of particulate matter originated from desert dust storms in the Eastern Mediterranean region” for the International Society of Exposure Science conference (Durham, NC)
2. Marta Guasch-Ferré, Nutrition: “Gut Microbiota related Plasma Metabolites and Risk of Cardiovascular Disease in the PREDIMED Study” for the American Heart Association, EPI/Lifestyle 2017 Scientific Sessions (Portland, OR)
3. Marguerite Nyhan, Environmental Health: “Quantifying Population Exposure to Fine Particulate Matter Air Population Using Mobile-Device-Based Human Mobility Patterns” for the International Society of Environmental Epidemiology (Sydney, AUS)
4. William Robert Shaw, Immunology and Infectious Diseases: “Hormonal pathways linking egg development and Plasmodium infection in Anopheles gambiae mosquitoes” for Mosquito Kolymbari Meeting (Kolymbari, Greece)

Each application was assigned to two faculty judges from departments other than the applicant’s. The average score was based on the quality of the abstract, mentor support letter, personal statement, and research statement.

We are currently in the process of revamping the judging criteria.

Congratulations to all the winners!

For the Spring Travel Award, we received 24 applications from postdocs and 4 from research associates. The winners were:

1. Laura Balzer, Biostatistics: “A new approach to hierarchical data analysis: targeted maximum likelihood estimation of cluster-based exposures under interference” for the Society for Epidemiologic Research (Seattle, WA)
2. Mary Ellen Molloy, Environmental Health: “Positive cross-regulatory loop links ZBTB7A to estrogen receptor alpha expression in breast cancer, American” for the Association for Cancer Research (Washington D.C.)
3. Rebecca L. Franckle, Nutrition “The impact of the monthly SNAP issuance cycle on consumer shopping behaviors in a large Northeastern supermarket chain” for the International Society of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity (Victoria, BC, Canada)
4. Danielle Braun, Biostatistics: “Methods to Estimate Causal Effects Adjusting for Confounding when an Ordinal Exposure is Mismeasured” for the Atlantic Causal Inference Conference (Chapel Hill, NC)
Social Events

by Mudit Chaand, PDA Social Co-chair

The Harvard Chan PDA takes pride in organizing diverse social events throughout the year to encourage interaction amongst the Postdoc and Research Associate community at the Harvard Chan School and the greater Boston research community.

The 2016-2017 academic year was kicked off by bonding over drinks and appetizers during Happy Hour at Mission Bar and Grill in September.

In November, the Harvard Chan PDA teamed up with MGH PDA to co-sponsor a club night at Whiskey Saigon. The PDAs negotiated free entry to the popular nightclub with a Harvard ID. Later that month, the PDA also sponsored a Green Card Q&A session with renowned immigration attorney Rachel Casseus. The event was attended by postdocs and research associates from HMS and HSPH.

In December, the Harvard Chan PDA organized its annual Holiday Luncheon, which was very well-attended. In line with the spirit of the season, the PDA also donated canned food items collected at the event to The Greater Boston Food Bank, the largest hunger relief organization in New England.

In addition to socializing, we have also focused on fitness this year by teaming up with the MGH PDA to organize a Soul Cycle class at their Beacon Hill studio.

In April, we held the Annual Spring Luncheon. Keeping with the tradition, winners of the PDA Spring Travel Awards were announced.

This summer, we co-sponsored the school wide Pride Week Reception to celebrate the LGBTQIA community, at which Dr. Meredith Rosenthal shared the sentiments of Dean Williams on the importance of the event.

“Issues, affecting the LGBTQ community are public health issues and we, as public health practitioners and professionals, have the responsibility of being allies and must work in unity with our LGBTQ community.”

~Dean Michelle Williams

We finished the year strong by welcoming the new postdocs and the always late New England summer with a family-friendly Ice Cream Social at Landmark Center in Fenway. Delicious ice creams and sorbets were catered from J.P. Licks.

In accordance with our recent Social Events Survey, this upcoming year we are committed to including more joint events with other Boston-area PDAs as well as implementing community service opportunities. We are looking forward to our future events and hope to see you there!
Dean’s Advisory Committee on Diversity and Inclusion (DACDI) Update

by Aisha S. Dickerson, PDA VP of Advocacy

DACDI was formed in 2013 to discuss topics related to diversity and inclusion at HSPH and propose strategies and solutions for improving access for and relationships with under-represented and underserved groups at the school and in the community.

The DACDI full committee consists of representatives from the various constituencies at HSPH, including students, alumni, administrative staff, research staff, and academic appointees (postdoctoral research fellows and research associates).

The total number of representatives from each constituency is based on proportional representation at the School during each term.

Current representatives from the PDA include Christian Suharlim, PDA President, Aisha Dickerson, PDA VP of Advocacy, and Scott Olesen.

In addition to the full committee, DACDI has five subcommittees currently seeking members:

1. Student Voices
2. Retention and Success
3. Recruitment of Faculty Academic Appointees, and Staff
4. Education/Training/Communication
5. Accessibility and Inclusion Among Groups with Diverse Abilities

All HSPH community members are welcome to apply for membership!

If you are interested in becoming a Diversity Ambassador and lending your talents to any of these subcommittees, please forward your CV or résumé to DACDI@hsph.harvard.edu.

Additionally, Aisha Dickerson has been elected as the new Co-Chair of DACDI for the 2017-2018 academic year, and we hope that you will support her in DACDI’s effort to enhance the ongoing efforts at the Harvard Chan School.

More information can be found on the new DACDI webpage designed by our own Christian Suharlim.

www.hsph.harvard.edu/dacdi/
Retaining Postdoctoral Researchers with Families

by Aisha Dickerson, PDA VP of Advocacy

Earlier this year, we sent a representative to the National Postdoctoral Association 15th Annual Meeting held in San Francisco, CA from March 17th – 19th. One particular seminar of interest was on “Pregnancy, Parenting, and Postdocs” presented by Atty. Jessica Lee.

According to Title IX, which prohibits sex discrimination against postdocs, pregnant mothers are entitled to the same protections as people with temporary disabilities. This includes the allowance of maternity leave for “as long as medically necessary”. Title VII also prohibits employers from discriminating against trainees on the basis of sex and requires that pregnant women be provided with the same opportunities as employees with comparable education and skill level.

Recently The Pregnant Scholar research team released the final report of their study, which was conducted in an “effort to ensure that parents – and mothers in particular – have an equal opportunity to advance”.

Overall, postdoc mothers reported a high rate of receiving accommodations when requested. However, fear and a sense of isolation made postdocs mothers hesitant to request such accommodations. Only 40% reported asking for accommodations when needed.

“I was too scared to let my colleagues in the laboratory know that I was expecting until I couldn’t hide my pregnancy further.”

Most women reported positive responses from their PIs regarding maternity leave requests, but many reported subtle tactics to shorten leave time including threats to pull funding and constant reminders of report deadlines. Additionally postdocs of color were less likely to ask for leave and more likely to be discouraged from taking leave.

“I took less leave than I was allotted, was extremely inefficient (sleep deprivation, etc.) for at least four months following my return, and eventually went on medication to deal with the stress of being a parent and postdoc.”

More often than not, fathers were left out of university family leave policies, and many felt as if their institution sent the message that paternity leave was not acceptable. Approximately 1/10 institutions provided no paid time off for postdoc fathers while others had restrictions on using sick time for caretaking. In many cases where both parents are postdocs, losing both incomes was not a financially feasible option.

Fortunately, the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health does have an established policy for maternity (birth mothers) and parental (fathers or adoptees) leave. A summary is as follows:

- Birth mothers are eligible for up to 13 weeks of paid leave.
- Non-birth parents are eligible for up to 4 weeks of paid leave with approval from his/her department.

Details on these policies can be found at https://hsph.me/postdoc-leave-policy

Also, paid sick leave, which can be applied toward parental leave, can accrue annually. However, it must be documented during each annual evaluation period using this form: https://hsph.me/postdoc-attendance-form

If you would like to read the detailed report Parents in the Pipeline: Retaining Research with Families, please visit www.ThePregnantScholar.org or contact the report’s lead author at leejessica@uchastings.edu.
PH 101 Nanocourses

by Tia McGill Rogers, PDA Education Initiatives Chair

This past fall, Dr. Kerry Ivey and Dr. Rachel Kelly led nanocourse participants on an engaging journey during the Metabolomics: Utilizing Metabolomic Data in Scientific Research nanocourse. Metabolomics, which is an interdisciplinary “omics” science, that combines bioinformatics, epidemiology, analytical biochemistry and biology, is a unique and emerging powerful tool that will make a substantial impact on discovery-driven science.

Through a combination of cutting edge examples and guest lectures from Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, Harvard Medical School, and Metabalon, Inc., experts, participants gained the basic framework for planning and executing successful metabolomic studies, enabling them to take advantage of this exciting new technology in their future work.

This spring, Dr. Aisha Dickerson, Dr. Jacqueline Cohen and Vy Nguyen gave Public Health 101: Introduction to Epidemiology nanocourse participants an unforgettable introduction to the field of epidemiology. Session one included topics such as observational study designs, effect estimates, selection and information bias, confounding, and effect modification.

“The course gave good descriptions and examples of basic epidemiological principles. I work in the School of Public Health, and the course has given me good background knowledge for my job.”

~Nanocourse Evaluation

Participants then used their new knowledge to critically review an epidemiologic study, assess its validity, and evaluate the quality. In the end, participants came away with a better understanding of the epidemiologic evidence typically included in grant and manuscript submissions and an enhanced ability to critically read health news.

The nanocourse Public Health 101: Nutritional Epidemiology-From Dietary Assessment to Public Health Recommendations will also be offered again this August.

We invite postdoctoral fellows and research associates to propose, design, and execute a nanocourse in their field of expertise during the 2017-2018 academic year. For more information or to propose a nanocourse, please contact us at PDA@hsph.harvard.edu.

Special Thanks

Harvard Medical School Curriculum Fellow Dr. Bradley I. Coleman has worked closely with nanocourse instructors during the nanocourse development process and delivered the fall 2016 course development workshop to introduce approaches to help instructors become more effective teachers, from designing course syllabi to delivering content.

Dr. Coleman, we thank you for your dedication and the legacy of excellence you have worked diligently to create.
**Editor’s Note**

The PDA and contributors to the Crimson Chronicle aim to inform the school about activities organized by our community that are intended to enhance our professional development and enrich our experience at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. We hope that you have found the enclosed information interesting. Your feedback is much appreciated and essential for the improvement of The Crimson Chronicle and the work of the PDA Council. Please feel free to keep sharing your comments and ideas, and join us at the monthly PDA meetings.

On behalf of the PDA Council, I would like to acknowledge Dr. Mahnaz El-Kouedi, Christina Burkot, and Isin Ugur-Bastepe from the Office of Faculty Affairs, Dean Meredith Rosenthal, Dean Michelle Williams, and members of the Postdoc Advisory Committee for their tremendous support of our many programs and our advocacy efforts.

I would also like to thank all the active PDA Council members for their constant efforts to optimize our personal and professional experiences at the School. Specifically, I would like to extend special thanks to Christian Suharlim, Jacqueline Cohen, Tia McGill Rogers, and other newsletter contributors for their extra effort during the preparation of this issue.

Best wishes,

Aisha S. Dickerson, PhD
PDA Vice President of Advocacy

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