

Division of Biology and Medicine

February 2008

Template text for Postdoctoral Mentoring Plan required in NSF proposals

Customize to individual situation

The Division of Biology and Medicine (BioMed) at Brown University employs just over 100 Postdoctoral Research Associates and Postdoctoral Research Fellows. Postdoctoral researchers at Brown receive guidance and professional development through a variety of departmental, institutional, and mentor resources designed to facilitate their career success. Newly hired postdocs in BioMed make an appointment to report to the Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies on their first day at Brown to complete the I-9 hiring process with Postdoctoral Program and Data Manager, Ms. Roberta Swanson. During this time they receive a new “Postdoc Welcome Packet”, a folder that contains hiring forms, steps to completing the hiring process, information about various campus resources and upcoming professional development events, and information on the National Postdoctoral Association. New postdocs also meet with Associate Dean for Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies, Nancy Thompson. Ms. Swanson and Dean Thompson point out various resources that are listed on the Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies website (<http://biomed.brown.edu/grad-postdoc/postdocs.html>) including links to the Responsible Conduct in Research training schedule, Mentoring Monday events, BioCareer Center, fellowship and grant opportunities, a parent trainee website that provides family friendly resources and policies, and other features of interest. At this time postdocs also receive a copy of the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) Compact Between Postdoctoral Appointees and Their Mentors, and a copy of the Postdoctoral Performance Assessment form. The postdocs are counseled on how to utilize these tools to set goals and expectations and measure progress jointly with their mentor.

The self-assessment portion of the Postdoctoral Performance Assessment is to be initiated by new postdocs after approximately six to eight months at Brown. This provides a means to comment and list research projects, technical and other skills acquired, abstract and fellowship submissions, and other areas under development. The self-assessment will be provided to the mentor as a means for discussion prior to the end of the appointment. The mentor will provide written feedback and particularly note where further progress is needed. Using this tool, research goals will be set for the next training period and career goals evaluated or updated. Each party will sign off and provide a dated copy to the Department manager as a record of the assessment. Annual assessment will take place in conjunction with reappointment or end of appointment.

Postdoctoral appointees receive email notices of professional development events sponsored or co-sponsored by the Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies and other offices including Biomed Faculty Affairs, Career Center, The Graduate School, and Brown University ADVANCE office. Recent events have included “The Scientist as Ethicist”; “Negotiating Job Offers”; “PI 101: Key advice for the newly independent investigator and those who hope to be”; “Communicating your Science to the Public and Press”; “Grantsmanship,” and “Non-academic Career Panel”. An annual “Resource and Networking Reception” is offered in roundtable format for new postdocs to get oriented to resources available at Brown, and for continuing postdocs to re-familiarize themselves with resources available. Other events are sponsored in conjunction with Postdoctoral Training Grants within BioMed.

Individual assistance to identify and apply for external fellowships is available to BioMed postdocs through The Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies. Training Grant and Fellowship Coordinator, Elizabeth McClaine is available by appointment to consult with individuals about funding opportunities for which they qualify, and to provide guidance about format, deadlines and approvals needed within Office of Sponsored Research. Ms. McClaine is also able to provide new applicants with examples of the best way to present their information and ideas.

Postdocs seeking training in teaching are encouraged to avail themselves of the Harriet W. Sheridan Center for Teaching and Learning. The Center offers training leading to a Sheridan Center Teaching Certificate at three program levels. A rich series of colloquia, workshops, and seminars is available. Recent titles have included: “Cognitive Diversity in the Classroom – Teaching to Different Learning Styles”; Teaching Graduate Students” and “Writing all Year Round”. In addition, postdocs can schedule individual consultations for teaching, presentations, grants, and courses with Associate Center Director Kathy Takayama, PhD. Additional opportunities to gain teaching experience in preparation for an academic career are available via Brown’s Office of Summer and Continuing Studies.

Brown University is a member of the BioCareer Center, Inc. This consortium, comprised of 17 member research-intensive institutions, has access to specialized career counseling resources and articles all specific for those in biology and biomedical fields. The Job Board has a job search and resume building database for postdocs and allows users from member institutions to upload and edit multiple CVs/resumes, cover letters, and references in a protected site that is accessed via the Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies website.

The institutional resources described above are complementary to the direct guidance that faculty mentors provide to postdoctoral trainees during regular individual and group laboratory meetings. Faculty provide day to day guidance on research design, data presentation and analysis, manuscript writing and editing, peer review, and meeting abstract and proposal writing via interactions with laboratory members. Examples of laboratory management and research integrity are learned from faculty and other members within the research group and department. For this reason, mentors are also encouraged to attend Mentoring Monday events and take advantage of resources provided via the Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies.

Departmental and Center seminars and symposia with nationally and internationally renowned speakers provide a rich training environment for postdoctoral trainees particularly in Brown’s close-knit and geographically close community of scholars. Frequent shuttle bus service provides transportation around campus and to the nearby affiliated hospitals.

The mentoring tools and resources described above are intended to promote professionalism and collegiality as trainees work toward independence. It is recognized however, that pursuit of research excellence involves competition, deadlines, and unknown outcomes. All of these can on occasion lead to unresolved stress and conflict. In such cases, postdocs may seek assistance from their Department Chair, or the Associate Dean for Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies as appropriate. Further resources of assistance are available from Brown Human Resources, Office of Vice President for Research, Office of Diversity, and the University Ombudsperson. We seek feedback from postdocs as they train at Brown and as they move to independent careers. All postdocs are encouraged to provide information about their next position and schedule a confidential exit interview with the Associate Dean for Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies.

Nancy L. Thompson, February 2008