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# The POSTDOCKet

The Official Newsletter of the National Postdoctoral Association

## The NPA Will Confer the 2010 Distinguished Service Award Upon Trevor Penning

*Cathee Johnson Phillips*

The NPA will confer the 2010 Distinguished Service Award (DSA) upon **Trevor M. Penning, PhD**, at the NPA's 8th Annual Meeting, which will be held March 12-14 in Philadelphia, PA.

He is recognized in the postdoctoral community as a long-time advocate on behalf of postdoctoral scholars, both on the home and national fronts.



**Trevor M. Penning, PhD**

One of his nominators wrote: "In addition to his remarkable work in shaping Penn's own postdoctoral program, Dr. Penning was a force for change at the national level.

This commitment to the larger postdoctoral community is a testament to his personal conviction that training the next generation of scientists is a critical part of a healthy scientific enterprise. The unflagging support he has given the NPA and his advocacy for improved postdoctoral training in general is deserving of our highest honor, the DSA."

When Dr. Penning learned of his award, he said, "I am both honored and humbled to be in the same company as past recipients."

**Penning, continued on page 10**

## Michigan Regional Meeting: Creating Career Roadmaps for Postdocs

*Will Brackenbury*

The first NPA regional meeting in Michigan was held at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, on October 10th, 2009. The event titled "Career Roadmaps for Postdocs" addressed the "mis-training" of postdoctoral scholars, which remains an endemic problem in the United States: most postdocs are still being groomed for tenure-track academic careers to which fewer than a third will actually have access. The purpose of the NPA regional meeting was to make postdocs aware of the broad range of career opportunities and to facilitate networking. The meeting agenda provided two concurrent disciplin-

ary tracks in order to address the differing needs and expectations of postdocs in (1) the biomedical and physical sciences and (2) the humanities and social sciences, including the professional schools.

The conference attendance exceeded the organizers' expectations with 227 postdocs from across Michigan and northern Ohio registered, highlighting the dire need for such career development. The sessions in both disciplinary tracks were presented by leading experts in their fields. For postdocs in the humanities and social sciences, the

**Michigan, continued on page 2**

# Securing Postdoc Health Insurance at Your Institution

Wendy Perry

Creating a suitable health insurance program for postdoctoral scholars poses unique challenges to institutions, largely due to the funding models that support postdoctoral research. A seemingly inexorable inequity often exists between postdocs paid intramurally as employees of the institution and postdocs on stipend who often do not enjoy employee benefits. The inequity weakens morale and constitutes a disincentive to compete for extramural funding. Research suffers as a result. This year the University of Virginia introduced a new model that not only solves this problem but cuts sizeable costs. Following are recommendations for securing postdoc health insurance at your institution.

## Consult with peers

Brainstorming with colleagues across the country is an important first step. Insight into the array of problem-solving approaches provides useful examples from which to draw. Of crucial note are the constraints that state law can place on an institution's ability to effect change. Is it a public or private institution? What is its size? How large is the postdoc community? Some universities elect to classify postdocs as students precisely to bypass the health insurance predicament, while others disagree with that classification on a philosophical level. In certain cases, institutions have obtained postdoc eligibility for health insurance by classifying postdocs as "trainees."

Garnett-Powers and Associates is another valuable resource. A benefit management company that specializes in developing benefit programs for postdocs, Garnett-Powers has partnered with a number of institutions and the NPA to create effective solutions to these issues.

## Seek institutional buy-in

Persistence and patience are essential qualities in seeking institutional buy-in. The human resources unit that manages benefits will need to be involved, as will

the divisions of legal counsel and procurement. Participation of other units will vary by institution.

At the University of Virginia, this onboarding process took time. Prior to 2010, we managed a distinct health insurance plan for postdoc fellows on stipend that was separate from the plan covering postdoctoral employees, and this solution was widely viewed within the University as the best we could do. The insurance program for fellows on stipend was inferior, however, and forcing postdocs to switch back and forth between plans as their funding changed was complicated, impractical, and a major irritant to postdocs, faculty, and research administrators. Ultimately our efforts required an endorsement at the vice-presidential level to gain the investment of other units.

## Challenge false assumptions

Without question, false assumptions were the biggest obstacle we confronted. To paraphrase a standard response: *Our institution is different—solutions elsewhere won't work here.* Garnett-Powers and Associates played a key role in helping us change the thinking about postdoc health insurance at the University of Virginia as we set out to create a distinct program for all postdocs.

False assumptions at our institution included:

- *Separating the postdocs who are employees from the wider employee pool will cause the employee health insurance rate to rise.* False. Removing 350 postdocs from an employee pool of 12,000+ has no effect on the employee rate.
- *Separating the postdocs who are employees from the wider employee pool is prohibited by law.* This assumption, too, is false in Virginia, as long as there are no "take-aways," meaning that no benefits are lost.
- *Creating a distinct insurance plan for a small group of 450 people will cost too much and result in a high rate.* False. On the contrary, postdocs are generally a young and healthy population. Therefore, the rate is typically low compared to employee rates.

The University of Virginia now provides a single health insurance plan for all post-

docs, employees funded intramurally and fellows on stipend. No longer are postdocs required to change their insurance as their funding changes, and all postdocs enjoy the same coverage provided by the group that also carries our faculty/staff employee plan. Garnett-Powers and Associates was an excellent resource to us as we tackled this problem, although in the end we decided to execute and manage the solution in-house.

The beauty of our result is that although we did not set out to cut costs, we cut them substantially anyway. We aimed to solve the most pressing practical problem facing our postdocs and to improve our process. In doing so we discovered that better can sometimes be cheaper. In the case of our postdoc health insurance program, savings range from 17 to 43 percent less than regular employee rates based on dependent status, and these savings are passed on to the postdocs and research grants. This solution comes as a timely win-win move serving the big picture.

Wendy Perry, PhD, is Director of Graduate and Postdoctoral Professional Development Programs in the Office of the Vice President for Research at the University of Virginia.

## Plan for Your Retirement with NPA Member Benefit

Are you planning for your retirement? Being an NPA member can help. The NPA, in partnership with MetLife, is now offering NPA members an opportunity to participate in a deferred annuity program, the MetLife Personal Pension Builder<sup>SM</sup>. NPA would like to recognize Garnett-Powers & Associates, Inc. for their assistance, making it possible for us to offer this benefit to our members. Garnett-Powers is a long-time friend of the NPA. For more information, please download an informational brochure [here](#).

# The 2010 NPA Annual Meeting—Planned With YOU In Mind

Dave Taylor

The NPA Annual Meetings are truly one of a kind, catering to a diverse and motivated audience of postdoctoral fellows, postdoc association leaders, postdoc administrators and research mentors. Ensuring that each group gets the most out of the packed agenda is no easy task. For the past seven years, the NPA has successfully taken on the challenge and brought hundreds of attendees together for a weekend of networking, workshops and idea-sharing. The NPA's 8th Annual meeting, which will be held in Philadelphia, PA on March 12-14, 2010, will be no different.

One new addition to the 2010 meeting is the freshly reformatted *NPA "Innovation in Action" Discussion Sessions*. These will provide future scientific leaders with fast-paced and highly interactive forums in which to discuss a broad range of crucial subjects. The session on Friday will focus on roundtable discussions among a mixed audience, tackling critical topics such as "Promoting Communication To and

Among Postdoctoral Fellows" and "Building and Retaining Interest in Postdoctoral Development Activities." On Saturday the forum will switch gears, taking on an informal, idea-sharing speed session to allow discussion of a wide variety of subjects. Selected topics include "Making your Postdoc Association Accessible," "Organizing Career Fairs," "Encouraging Good Mentoring," and "Recruiting Members for Postdoc Associations," among many others. The interplay of the diverse audience is vital to the success of this session.

On Sunday Audrey Murrell, PhD, will also be on hand to deliver an exciting and far-reaching plenary speech. Dr. Murrell, an associate professor of Business Administration, Psychology, and Public and International Affairs, is a foremost expert in areas of mentoring, leadership development, and workforce diversity. Her plenary speech will focus on topics gleaned from her most recent book, entitled "Mentoring Dilemmas: Devel-

opmental Relationships within Multicultural Organizations." Meeting attendees will learn a great deal from Dr. Murrell's expertise, including how to effectively mentor and how to develop talent in a diverse and complex work environment.

With such a wide range of sessions and topics, it is clear that the NPA's 8th Annual Meeting was planned with you in mind. Add these exciting events to an agenda already packed full with practical workshops, networking sessions, leadership building exercises, and a high profile keynote speech from NIH Director Francis Collins, MD, PhD, and you have a meeting tailor fit for any scientific audience.

*Dave Taylor, PhD, is the Academic Programs Officer in the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs at The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, serves as Chair of the NPA Meetings Committee, and was recently appointed to serve a one-year term on the NPA Board of Directors.*

## Michigan, continued from page 1

morning included sessions on applying for research funds, career trajectories, and the joys and perils of being a productive and balanced faculty member. Postdocs in the biomedical and physical sciences had the opportunity to choose from a panel discussion on competing for fellowship funding and concurrent morning sessions on careers in industry, non-profit science organizations, the federal government, public science policy, patent law, science publishing, and various academic settings. The two tracks rejoined for a networking lunch at which the speakers were available for *ad hoc* discussions and to answer postdocs' questions. In the afternoon the registrants again divided for different keynote sessions. These were open to the public and drew a slightly larger crowd.

The biomedical and physical sciences postdocs attended an insightful workshop presented by Peter Fiske, PhD, Chief Technology Officer of PAX Mixer, Inc., and PAX Water Technologies, entitled "Put Your Science to Work". For the humanities/social sciences postdocs, Kerry Ann Rockquomore, PhD, gave a presentation entitled "Every Postdoc Needs a Plan: How to Create the Support, Community and Strategic Plan You Need for a Successful Fellowship Experience". The day came to a close with a joint networking reception, at which wine and cheese facilitated the forging of new relationships, and hopefully, some clearer and more focused career trajectories.

The successful NPA regional event was a collaboration between the University

of Michigan Center for the Education of Women, the University of Michigan Postdoctoral Association, the University of Michigan Medical School Office of Postdoctoral Studies, Michigan State University, and Wayne State University. Additional sponsorship was provided by Centocor Ortho Biotech, Inc., the University of Michigan Diversity Council, and the Rackham Graduate School.

*Will Brackenbury, PhD, is a Research Fellow in the Pharmacology Department at the University of Michigan Medical School. He is President of the University of Michigan Postdoc Association <http://sitemaker.umich.edu/umpda/home>. Further details on the Michigan Regional Meeting and the speakers is at [http://sitemaker.umich.edu/umpda/symposium\\_materials](http://sitemaker.umich.edu/umpda/symposium_materials).*



# The h-index Impact on Academic Career Advancement

Mark Kroenke

Publications are the cornerstone of scientific inquiry. Although their primary function is to communicate scientific data and novel ideas, they also serve as a scientific currency used to secure grants and promotions and garner peer respect. All journals have an associated impact factor, which is calculated by dividing the total number of citations a journal receives by the total number of articles it publishes within a two year period. Journals that are widely read and frequently cited typically have an impact factor that is greater than fifteen, while lesser known, specialized publications usually have an impact factor in the low single-digit range.

While journal impact factors make it easy to gauge the relative worth of a journal, evaluating the productivity of an individual scientist by simply glancing at his or her curriculum vitae can be a very difficult task. Is an individual with three high impact papers a more valuable asset than someone with ten low impact publications? **In 2005 Jorge Hirsch proposed the h-index as a way to estimate an individual's scientific accomplishments.** The h-index is calculated by taking the investigator's total number of papers that have been cited by a number equal to or greater than their h-index. For instance, if an investigator has an h-index of twenty, he or she has at least twenty publications, each of which has been cited twenty or more times. The investigator may have other papers with fewer than twenty citations, but these are not considered in the h-index calculation. Another scientist with two papers that have been cited one hundred times each would only have an h index of two, but publishing a third paper that

is only cited three times increases the h-index to three.

The h-index calculation takes into account both the quantity and quality of publications, such that a highly prolific scientist publishing in obscure journals will have approximately the same value as an investigator publishing a few papers exclusively in journals with a high impact factor. In addition to comparing investigators, the h-index can easily be applied to entire departments or institutions. In some instances, however, the h-index is misleading. Scientists with very significant but abbreviated careers will not have a high h-index. Also, papers with numerous authors can inflate the h-index of those who may not have contributed much to the work. Furthermore, the h-index is limited by quantity of publications such that a scientist with ten papers each cited over 1,000 times has the same h index as someone with ten papers each cited ten times. While the former scientist is clearly more accomplished, this is not reflected in the index. As a result of circumstances such as these, the h-index must be considered in a broad context, but is nevertheless very useful.

Many companies and institutions are beginning to use the h-index as one criterion used in making personnel decisions. Harry L.T. Mobley, PhD, Chairman of the Department of Microbiology at the University of Michigan, believes the h-index is most useful when assessing promotions for faculty from Assistant to Associate Professor and Associate to Full Professor but is less useful for graduate students and postdoctoral scholars because of the time required to acquire appreciable citations. The h-index has been formally proposed as one of twenty criteria to be considered regarding promotions, but the University of Michigan has yet to adopt this measure. Numerous Web sites capable of calculating h indices are now available online. One of best in terms of accuracy and ease of use is the Thomson Reuters *Web of Science* database, which is available through most university libraries. After searching the database for a particular author, just click on "Create citation report" to determine the h-index.

*Mark Kroenke is a Postdoctoral Fellow at La Jolla Institute for Allergy and Immunology and a freelance writer for the NPA.*



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# For Postdoctoral Scholars: How to Be Proactive in Your Mentoring Relationship

Melissa Muller

It is no secret that professionals are often groomed by others who have paved the way in their chosen fields. The ability to proactively seek out those mentors who truly provide valuable guidance can be vital in determining a postdoctoral scholar's career path. Being proactive can be as simple as monthly check-in calls, meetings or e-mails to stay in touch. For some it can involve asking for a mentor to be assigned by Human Resources or searching for a second or third mentor.

The most successful mentoring relationships are those in which the mentee takes initiative and truly drives the mentoring partnership. It is important that the mentee helps determine the pace, route and destination of the partnership. This will allow the mentor to offer insights and counsel that are customized to the mentee's objectives. Moreover, the mentee must realize that the mentor is a guide and not the one responsible for the mentee's actions. The mentor can only open the doors and introduce the mentee to the right situations. The mentee also needs to be proactive in searching for secondary mentors and other opportunities that will allow the growth and development of their own professional network.

Listed are some suggestions on how mentees can best take advantage of the mentoring opportunities they are offered:

- *Make time to meet regularly with your mentor(s).* Being mentored is an important long-term investment, not just another hassle in your short-term schedule. Be prepared for your meetings and have specific goals and tasks in mind. Keep the frequency of your meetings realistic, in terms of both your mentor's and your own schedules.
- *Learn to ask for help or feedback.* Clear communication is the cornerstone on

which all other factors sit. It is through constructive and empathetic dialogues that relationships can develop, allowing both parties to bring forward their ideas, enter discussions, and maintain professional development. This communication helps establish clear and well-defined objectives and makes sure that your objectives are realistic given the circumstances.

- *Be willing to listen and learn.* Mutual trust is dependent upon maintaining confidences. Although difficult, the mentee has to be willing to openly accept criticism and feedback, demonstrating strength and the willingness to grow. The mentee needs to be able to accept and learn from the advice and observations.
- *Take advantage of opportunities presented.* Part of your professional development should include seminars, speakers, classroom observations, etc. Your mentor may provide guidance on which activities would be most beneficial.
- *Be open and honest.* This is vital in getting the guidance and assistance you may need and will offer your mentor the assurance that they also can rely on you. Mentees should be consistent and make sure to follow through on commitments.
- *Be proactive about your needs.* Being proactive is much more than just taking the initiative—it's about accepting responsibility for your own behaviors (past, present and future). It is about building partnerships based on principles. Being a proactive protégé includes remembering that you must respect your mentor's time and make the most of it.
- *Be a problem solver.* When bringing problems to your mentor, you should have possible solutions in mind to foster the development of your own problem-solving skills. While the mentor

can provide ideas and feedback, sometimes no one knows your situation better than you.

- *Be an active partner in your mentoring relationships.* Postdocs need to be able to accept advice and criticism but also know when to reject some advice. While not all of the advice given by a mentor should be followed blindly, the postdoc should genuinely consider the guidance that is given and, if the advice is not followed, be prepared to explain why. Clarifying expectations will ensure that mentees get the help they need and achieve their mentoring goals.

No matter what kind of a mentor you have—one who offers little or no help; one who constantly overwhelms you with information; or even a mentor who is an experienced teacher and understands how to work effectively with a postdoc—you will get more out of mentoring if you are proactive in the process.

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*"A true mentor does two things:  
believes in a person and has  
absolutely no feelings of competition."*  
—Sue Pivetta

*"If you want to be a master, study  
what the masters have done before you.  
Learn to do what they have done—  
have the guts to do it—and you  
will be a master too."*  
—Jos. J. Charbonneau

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Additional mentoring information may be found at: <http://www.nationalpostdoc.org/publications/mentoring-plans>

Melissa Muller, PhD, is a Research Scientist at the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, Texas and serves as an Associate Editor for the POSTDOCKET.

# Is My Work in the National Interest?

Adam Frank and Brendan Delaney

This article is the last of our three-part series about green card applications that do not require a labor certification. This article will discuss the National Interest Waiver (NIW), which, in our experience, is the application most appropriate for scientists and the one that is more likely to be approved. The NIW is a self-sponsored employment-based application. The statutory and regulatory standards are similar for this application: The alien must have an advanced degree or exceptional ability and show that his or her work would be in the national interest. The term "National Interest" is not defined in the statute or regulations, but it has previously been defined by the courts. They have laid out a three-part test that the applicant must meet to qualify for the NIW:

1. The alien must be employed in an area of substantial intrinsic merit;
2. Benefit of the alien's work must be national in scope;
3. The alien must serve the national interest to a substantially greater degree than would an available U.S. worker having the same minimum qualifications.

Generally, the first two steps are easy to show. Most research is connected to an area of substantial intrinsic merit and the benefit of work can be shown to be national in scope. The third part of the test is more difficult, which requires the scientist to provide similar paperwork as is requested in the Extraordinary Ability and Outstanding Researcher application (published papers, citation history, peer reviews, grant support, etc.). However, the

standard is less restrictive than that of the Extraordinary Ability application and generally requires less supporting documents to get approved. A successful applicant should be able to show some level of impact that their work has had on a specific area or that their research has been implemented or utilized in some positive manner by others in the field.

Applicants from India and China will be subject to a longer timeframe for receipt of the actual permanent residence through this visa application due to the current backlog from five to eight years for individuals from these countries. Although they can get the I-140 in the NIW category approved within four to six months, they cannot file the I-485 (adjustment of status) based upon this application until visas become available. In the interim, they need to retain some sort of non-immigrant status.

**UPDATES:** No more cap subject H-1B visas are available for the current fiscal year. You can only apply for an H Visa subject to the cap in April 2010, with a start date of October 1, 2010, or for H applications that are not subject to the cap. Regarding the Visa Bulletin for February 2010, the dates for EB-2's will be May 22, 2005 for China and January 22, 2005 for India. Visa numbers are projected to move slowly for this year (China to October 2005, India to May 2005), but this is dependent on whether the U.S. Congress passes an Immigration Reform bill.

*Adam Frank, Esq. and Brendan Delaney are at the law firm of Leavy & Frank, L.L.C. (<http://www.leavyfrank.com>), which specializes in immigration law. The firm conducts Legal Seminars for International Postdocs on behalf of the NPA.*

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## About the NPA

*Angela Kindig*

At any given time across the United States, from 43,000 to 89,000 postdoctoral scholars work on a diverse range of research projects. Yet while there appears to be so many of us, the world of research can often be a solitary existence with limited information about many issues confronting the postdoctoral community. The path from graduate student to postdoc is a steep learning curve filled with hazardous twists and turns, a time when many scientists struggle to succeed.

With this in mind, the NPA was formed in 2003 to provide postdocs with resources and information to enhance the quality of the postdoctoral experience in the United States. The NPA promotes positive improvement within this crucial period of a scientist's career by acting as a national and local advocate for postdocs in all areas of research.

The NPA supports postdocs in every discipline. Achievements such as improv-

ing postdoctoral health insurance policies, implementing salary guidelines, and advocating for the adoption of new guidelines for grants and mentoring within the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the National Science Foundation (NSF), testify to the power of this organization. On a local level, the NPA provides general support for postdocs, encourages the implementation of recommended practices at institutions, provides "toolkits" for postdoctoral associations and offices, and promotes career development options to postdocs.

Currently, the NPA encompasses over 1,500 paying members and another 6,000 subscribers. The NPA also supports postdoctoral associations and offices located at over 170 institutions nationwide. The NPA Board of Directors consists of volunteers who are postdocs, academics, administrators, and professionals. The Board is elected by subscribers, who keep the leadership accountable to the goal of improving the quality of postdoctoral training in the United States. The Board oversees four membership committees:

Advocacy, Meetings, Outreach, and Resource Development.

The NPA Annual Meeting provides opportunities for the postdoctoral community to connect and participate in the many professional development courses offered. The meeting informs postdocs on a range of topics, including career planning, conflict resolution resources, legal advice, compensation and benefits, tax and retirement planning, diversity, and international postdoc support services. Prominent keynote speakers at NPA Annual Meetings have included NIH directors Elias Zerhouni and Francis Collins and NSF director Rita Colwell.

Postdocs, graduate students, faculty, administrators, and other stakeholders are invited to join the NPA and contribute to the ongoing efforts to improve the postdoctoral experience in the United States. Information can be found at [www.nationalpostdoc.org](http://www.nationalpostdoc.org).

*Angela Kindig is a Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Newcastle, Australia.*

## NPA NEWS RELEASE

### New Board Member is Appointed

*Kryste Ferguson*

The NPA Board of Directors is pleased to announce the appointment of David Taylor, PhD, as the newest member of the Board for 2010. Audrey Ellerbee, PhD, resigned as a Board member effective December 31, 2009. Dr. Ellerbee started a new faculty position at Stanford University in the Department of Electrical Engineering, and the NPA wishes her well in her new endeavors. The Board is pleased that Dr. Taylor could finish Dr. Ellerbee's term this year and provide his expertise to the organization.

Dr. Taylor is currently serving as the Chair of the Meetings Committee and will be resigning effective March 31, 2010.



David Taylor, PhD

The NPA is accepting nominations to fill this position.

Dr. Taylor earned his Bachelor of Science degree in Biology from Utica College of Syracuse University and his PhD

from the University of Virginia, where he studied the role of transcription factors in the differentiation and development of pancreatic beta cells. In 2006 he began a postdoctoral fellowship at The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, studying beta cell proliferation in transgenic mouse models. Interested in a career beyond the bench, he transitioned into a Research Administration Fellowship at Children's Hospital, where he garnered extensive experience working in clinical trials administration, research compliance, training and education, research finance, strategic planning and postdoctoral affairs. His interest in postdoctoral programming and advocacy led him to a permanent position at Children's Hospital as an Academic Programs Officer in the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs. He has been involved with the NPA for three years.

*Kryste Ferguson is the Information Technology Manager of the NPA.*

# FAQ About NPA-sponsored Healthcare

Cathee Johnson Phillips

This article will cover the Frequency Asked Questions regarding The [Postdoctoral Scholar Injury and Sickness Insurance Plan](#) that is offered by the NPA and Garnett-Powers and Associates, Inc.

## General Information

*1. Why is the NPA offering health insurance?*  
The NPA saw a need that it could fill. Often, postdoctoral scholars who are not classified as employees of an institution do not qualify for the institutional health insurance plan. We wanted to offer a viable option for these postdocs.

*Please note:* It is not the intent of the NPA for the Postdoctoral Scholar Injury and Sickness Insurance Plan to take the place of or to undermine institutional health insurance plans. Rather, the intent is to fill a gap in coverage that currently exists for many postdocs who are not classified as employees and who many institutions find difficult to fund. **The NPA strongly recommends that institutions provide subsidized health insurance coverage for all of the postdocs at the institution and will continue to advocate for this coverage. Garnett-Powers & Associates, Inc., can assist institutions with providing this coverage.** But, until such coverage is universal, the NPA's intent is to fill the gap.

*2. Who is Garnett-Powers and Associates, Inc.?*  
Garnett-Powers and Associates, Inc. are longtime friends and supporters of the NPA. Tom and Joan Garnett and Steve Johnson sincerely care about postdocs and give generously to the NPA. Since 2006, they have been a major supporter of our Annual Meeting Travel Awards Program, providing more than \$20,000 in Travel Award Grants to postdocs. Their insurance programs also provide significant support for the NPA—and, most importantly, ensure that postdocs have the best health insurance coverage possible.

*3. What are some important features of the Postdoctoral Scholar Injury and Sickness Insurance Plan?*

These features include:

- Low monthly cost
- Access to a large nationwide panel of physicians
- Low co-pays and co-insurance for doctor's visits, hospitalization, lab, x-ray and prescriptions
- Coverage is available for your eligible dependents, including domestic partners
- Maternity is covered
- Coverage is guaranteed regardless of any medical condition
- All J1 visa requirements for medical coverage, repatriation, and medical evacuation are satisfied by enrollment in this plan.

## Eligibility

*4. Do you have to be a member of the NPA to be eligible for health insurance?*

Yes, you must be a full, individual, dues-paying member of the NPA. The annual membership fee is only \$35. [Follow this link](#) for more information.

*5. Who is eligible for this health insurance?*

- a. Only postdoctoral scholars are eligible for this insurance, as follows:
- b. Postdoctoral scholars who are full, individual NPA members AND do not have access to health insurance through their campuses.
- c. Dependents.

*Please note:* Other factors may influence eligibility. Final eligibility will be determined at the time of application.

*6. Are international postdoctoral scholars eligible for this plan?*

Yes, if they meet the other requirements noted in Question 4 above.

*7. Who is **not** eligible for this health insurance?*

Postdoctoral scholars who have access to health insurance at their institution are

not eligible. Faculty, administrators, or any other employees of the institution are not eligible.

*7. What if I have subsidized health insurance coverage, but I'm not happy with the coverage it provides?*

Sorry, you are not eligible.

## Coverage & Benefits

*8. Does the insurance plan include maternity coverage?*

Yes, it is paid as any other condition.

*10. What are the copays?*

The following copays apply:

- Physician's Visits, Diagnostic X-ray and Laboratory Services
  - \$25.00 per visit for Preferred Provider Physician's Visits; benefits are limited to one visit per day. Benefits for Physician's Visits do not apply when related to surgery or Physiotherapy.
  - \$25 Deductible per visit for Out-of-Network Provider Physician's Visits; benefits are limited to one visit per day. Benefits for Physician's Visits do not apply when related to surgery or Physiotherapy.
- Pharmacy Benefits
  - \$20 copay per prescription order or refill for a Tier 1 Prescription Drug up to a 31 day supply.
  - \$40 copay per prescription order or refill for a Tier 2 Prescription Drug up to a 31 day supply.
  - Your maximum allowed benefit is \$2,000 maximum Per Policy Year.
  - Mail order Prescription Drugs are available at 2.5 times the retail copay up to a 90 day supply.

*11. Are there deductibles?*

Yes, as follows:

- Preferred Provider Deductible \$200 (Per Insured Person, Per Policy Year)

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# New Leaders for the Resource Development Committee

Rachel Ruhlen and Anu Pradham

The NPA welcomes Pallavi Eswara, MS, as Chair and Sanjukta Chakraborty, PhD, as Vice-Chair to the Resource Development Committee. Both Rachel Ruhlen, who was elected to the 2010 NPA Board of Directors, and Anu Pradhan, who will be returning to India soon, are stepping down as Chair and Vice-Chair of the committee, respectively.

Eswara did her undergraduate and graduate studies in Genetics and Biotechnology in India. She obtained her MS degree in Human Genetics from the University of Michigan in 2001. Subsequently, she did research in the area of bioinformatics at Penn State. She has been a staff member at the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs since its inception in 2007 at Penn State University, State College, PA. She has been associated with the committee and its various projects since 2008.

Chakraborty is presently an American Heart Association postdoctoral research fellow in the Department of Systems Biology & Translational Medicine at Texas A&M Health Science Center,



Pallavi Eswara

College Station, Texas. She is investigating the molecular mechanisms of agonist-induced signal transduction in the lymphatic system and is keenly interested in delineating the role of lymphatic inflammation in various pathological conditions. Chakraborty obtained her PhD degree in Human Molecular Genetics from the Indian Institute of Science, India in 2007 and earned her MS degree in Zoology from Banaras Hindu University, India in 2002. Currently, she serves as the founding chair of the postdoctoral



Sanjukta Chakraborty, PhD

association for her department and has been actively involved with the NPA since 2009.

*Rachel Ruhlen, PhD, is a Postdoctoral Researcher at the University of Missouri, outgoing Chair of the NPA Resource Development Committee, and incoming member of the NPA Board of Directors. Anu Pradhan, PhD, is a Research Scientist at the Moffitt Cancer Center and outgoing Vice-Chair of the NPA Resource Development Committee.*

## Healthcare, continued from page 8

- Out-of-Network Provider Deductible \$500 (Per Insured Person, Per Policy Year).  
Out-of-pocket maximums are as follows:
  - Preferred Provider Out-of-Pocket Maximum: After the Deductible of \$200 Per Policy Year has been satisfied and the Insured Person has reached \$5,000 in Out-of-Pocket expenses, payment will be made for 100% of additional Covered Medical Expenses incurred at a Preferred Provider, not to exceed the \$250,000 maximum Per Policy Year.
  - Out-of-Network Out-of-Pocket

Maximum: After the Deductible of \$500 Per Policy Year has been satisfied and the Insured Person has reached \$20,000 in Out-of-Pocket expenses, payment will be made for 100% of additional Covered Medical Expenses incurred at an Out-of-Network provider, not to exceed the \$250,000 maximum Per Policy Year.

Deductibles and co-pays do not apply toward the Out-of-Pocket maximum.

Please see the [Plan Brochure](#) for more details regarding specific benefits.

## 12. Does the insurance cover pre-existing conditions?

Pre-existing conditions are covered only if you have previously had some sort of health insurance coverage. Otherwise, there may be a waiting period. Please contact [Garnett-Powers](#) for details and more information.

## Enrollment

How do I enroll in this insurance plan?

To enroll, please [follow this link](#).

*Cathee Johnson Phillips is the Executive Director of the NPA.*

# State of the NPA

Stacy Gelhaus

Dear NPA Membership:

The NPA's 8th Annual Meeting is right around the corner! We will be reconvening in Philadelphia, PA for a weekend focused on the challenges and opportunities of postdoctoral offices and postdoctoral associations on local, national, and global levels. This meeting will bring some new and interesting workshops and plenary sessions, such as workshops on advocacy and diversity and the Myers Briggs plenary that is sponsored by the Office of Intramural Training and Education (OITE) at the National Institutes of Health (NIH). We have a strong list of speakers lined up, including Audrey Mur-

rell, PhD, Associate Professor of Business Administration, Psychology, and Public and International Affairs and the Director of the David Berg Center for Ethics and Leadership at the University of Pittsburgh. Finally, we are very pleased to have the new NIH Director, Francis Collins, MD, PhD, as the keynote speaker at our meeting this year. Although he has just started his tenure at NIH, we have already heard him speak at length to the importance of postdoctoral scholars in the U.S. research enterprise.

In addition to the Annual Meeting, the NPA invites the postdoctoral commu-

nity to the Summit on Gender and the Postdoctorate that will take place March 10-11, 2010 in Philadelphia immediately preceding the Annual Meeting.

This conference is sponsored by the National Science Foundation (NSF) ADVANCE project. NSF ADVANCE is a project to assist women in their transition to the professoriate. For more information, please go to <http://www.nationalpostdoc.org/programs-resources/npa-advance/advance-summit>. I look forward to seeing all of you at the Gender Summit and Annual Meeting.

Stacy L. Gelhaus, PhD, is Chair of the Board of Directors.



## Penning, continued from page 1

Dr. Penning is a Professor of Pharmacology, Biochemistry and Biophysics, and Obstetrics-Gynecology and is the Director of the Center of Excellence in Environmental Toxicology (CEET) at the University of Pennsylvania (Penn) School of Medicine. The CEET is an Environmental Health Sciences Core Center funded by the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS). He is internationally recognized for his research on steroid hormone enzymology and mechanisms by which polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons cause cancer.

He oversaw the formation of the postdoctoral office at Penn, one of the first in the country, and served as the Director of the Office of Postdoctoral Programs and Associate Dean for Postdoctoral Research Training, School of Medicine from 1997-2001, and as Director of Biomedical Postdoctoral Programs (BPP) from 2001-2005.

When the NPA formed in 2001, Dr. Penning served on the first Advisory Board and played an influential role in guiding the nascent organization towards independence and national relevance. He was a driving force behind the collab-

orative efforts between the NPA and the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) Group on Graduate Research, Education, and Training (GREAT) Group Postdoctoral Steering Committee, a partnership that continues on today.

He served as chairman of the AAMC/GREAT group in 2005-2006 and was instrumental in developing numerous postdoctoral initiatives. A short list of these accomplishments includes a definition of a postdoc, the Compact Between Postdoctoral Appointees and Their Mentors, and a permanent Postdoctoral Steering Committee within AAMC/GREAT Group.

The DSA award represents appreciation for an individual or entity that has demonstrated either a profound, sustained, or leadership contribution to improving the postdoctoral experience. The award is presented in alternating years to either an individual or entity.

**Members of the Nominating Committee were:** Walter Goldschmidts, PhD, Cold Spring Harbor Lab; Laurel Haak, PhD, Discovery Logic; Victoria McGovern, PhD, Burroughs Wellcome Fund;

and, Joel Oppenheim, PhD, New York University Medical School.

**Members of the Award Selection Committee were:** Lisa Kozlowski, PhD, Chair, Thomas Jefferson University; Lori Conlan, PhD, NIH/OITE/Office of Postdoctoral Services; Joan Lakoski, PhD, University of Pittsburgh-School of Medicine; Caroline Rotondi, Brigham and Women's Hospital; and Dave Taylor, PhD, The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.

## Past recipients are:

- 2004 Ruth Kirschstein, MD, Senior Advisor to the Director, National Institutes of Health
- 2005 National Academies' Committee on Science, Engineering and Public Policy
- 2006 Laurel L. Haak, PhD, Science Director, Discovery Logics
- 2007 Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology
- 2008 Shirley Malcom, PhD, Director, Education and Human Resources Programs, American Association for the Advancement of Science
- 2009 The Alfred P. Sloan Foundation.

Cathee Johnson Phillips is the Executive Director of the NPA.

## NPA Committee Quarterly Reports

The following section is devoted to summarizing the vast array of activities underway within each of the four NPA Committees of the Membership—Advocacy, Outreach, Resource Development and Meetings. If you are interested in gaining professional experience in postdoc issues at the national level, please contact a Committee Leader directly. We seek interested and dedicated individuals who are willing to volunteer 3-10 hours/month. A comprehensive list of NPA Committee leaders can be found at the [Committee Leaders and Officers](#) page on the NPA Web site.

### Advocacy Committee

*Juliet Moncaster*

This past quarter the Advocacy Committee (AdCom) has been working on sup-

porting an increase in *National Research Service Award* (NRSA) stipends. The latest news is that President Obama included a 6% increase in the NRSA stipends in his Fiscal Year (FY) 2011 Budget. The Advocacy Committee will be encouraging NPA members and friends to contact their U.S. Senators and Representatives in support of this increase.

Regarding FY 2010, the Senate was to vote on H.R. 3293, which is the appropriations bill for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) 2010 budget. After the Senate vote, the bill was to go to “conference” to resolve the differences between the Senate and House versions of the bill. The House version contained a 2% increase in the NRSA stipend levels, but the Senate version did not include an increase in stipend levels. The NPA asked the Senate to accept the House language and include the 2% increase in the final version of the bill. Additionally, the NPA sent out a request

to its members via a NPA E-alert email and through messages posted on the NPA’s Facebook and LinkedIn pages to contact their respective U.S. Senators to encourage them to support this bill. The NPA thanks those who did send letters to their Senators. For our voice to be heard, it is important it comes from many individuals. On December 8, 2009, the House-Senate conference committee reached an agreement on an omnibus appropriations bill (H.R. 3288) that combined six of the unfinished FY 2010 measures, including the bill that funds NIH (H.R. 3293). The end result regarding NRSA stipends is the FY 2010 increase in training stipends was reduced to 1%. AdCom is now preparing to campaign for an increase in stipends for FY 2011.

If the topics above interest you, or if there are other issues that you think would be of interest to AdCom, please feel free to contact the AdCom Chair or Vice-Chair.

**Committees, continued on page 12**

## New Items at the NPA Store



[www.cafepress.com/thenpastore](http://www.cafepress.com/thenpastore)



**Committees**, continued from page 11  
AdCom is always looking for new volunteers to join the committee!

*Juliet Moncaster, PhD, is a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Boston University School of Medicine and Chair of the NPA Advocacy Committee.*

## Outreach Committee

*L. Dave Finger and Zoe Fonseca-Kelly*

Want to know what is going on with the NPA? Do not worry—it's our business to keep you informed and shamelessly promote events! The Outreach Committee (OC) continues its efforts to promote the upcoming Annual Meeting and gender summit by using social networking sites, such as Facebook and LinkedIn (So "friend" us please!), and by partnering with other organizations that share similar interests.

In other news, the OC is working to create T-shirts for the Annual Meeting that will be on sale at the NPA store booth; keep your eyes open for these NPA store items. The committee continues to seek out new membership incentives (We are always looking to get you deals wherever we can!), to develop an NPA alumni membership status, and to increase awareness of the NPA on Capitol Hill. With the advent of the New Year, the OC has commenced plans for the second (We're aiming for bigger and better!) National Postdoc Appreciation Day and to have the day recognized by Congress. For more information on how you can become involved with OC activities, please contact Dave Finger at [LFingerJr@coh.org](mailto:LFingerJr@coh.org).

*L. David Finger, PhD, is a Postdoctoral Scholar at the City of Hope Beckman Research Institute and Chair of the NPA Outreach Committee. Zoë Fonseca-Kelly, PhD, is Vice-Chair of the Outreach committee and was a Postdoctoral Scholar at Thomas Jefferson University until Fall 2009. Recently, she accepted a new postdoctoral position at the University of Pennsylvania.*

## Resource Development Committee

*Rachel Ruhlen and Anu Pradhan*

The Resource Development Committee

has been extremely busy making more resources available on the NPA Web site. Two new articles in the Mentoring section are "Developing a Postdoctoral Mentoring Plan for International Postdocs" [to see this article, see *POSTDOCKET* 7(4):7] and "For Postdoctoral Scholars: How to Be Proactive in Your Mentoring Relationship" [to see this article, see *POSTDOCKET* 8(1)].

Looking for newsletter articles? The Resource Development Committee has developed an article entitled "About the NPA" that you can include in your next newsletter [to see this article, see *POSTDOCKET* 8(1)]. Contact [cjphillips@nationalpostdoc.org](mailto:cjphillips@nationalpostdoc.org) if you would like to use this or other *POSTDOCKET* articles in your newsletter.

The committee also plans and develops the NPA's annual member survey. The NPA uses this data to find out how we can better serve our members. In previous surveys, you told us that our existing resources could be better promoted, the most valuable benefit is national representation, and you are very concerned about salaries. Your feedback guides our future efforts. Thank you!

We need you to help develop two new databases! The Professional Societies Database and the NPA Leadership Database will be indispensable tools for our growing organization. If you are interested in getting involved in a committee, these projects need several volunteers and require little training. We can set you to work right away, and the end products will be invaluable resources for building the NPA and performing our advocacy mission.

*Rachel Ruhlen, PhD, is a Postdoctoral Researcher at the University of Missouri, outgoing Chair of the NPA Resource Development Committee, and incoming member of the NPA Board of Directors. Anu Pradhan, PhD, is a Research Scientist at the Moffitt Cancer Center and outgoing Vice-Chair of the NPA Resource Development Committee.*

## Meetings Committee

*Dave Taylor*

The major focus of the Meetings Committee for the past quarter has been finalizing plans for the 2010 NPA meeting in Philadelphia, PA. For more information, please see "The 2010 NPA Annual Meeting—Planned With YOU In Mind" in the current issue of the *POSTDOCKET* [*POSTDOCKET* 8(1)] and follow [this link](#). To become involved with the Meetings Committee, please contact Dave Taylor.

*Dave Taylor, PhD, is the Academic Programs Officer in the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs at The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia and serves as Chair of the NPA Meetings Committee.*

## NPA Member Round-Up

Thank you to the following sustaining members that have joined or renewed their membership since the last issue of *The POSTDOCKET*.

### NEW

- Buck Institute for Age Research

### RENEWED

- Argonne National Laboratory
- American Association for Cancer Research
- Auburn University
- Burnham Institute
- Case Western Reserve University
- Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center
- Duke University
- Jackson State University
- Pennsylvania State University
- Purdue University
- Sandia National Laboratories
- University of Alabama at Birmingham
- University of Cincinnati
- University of Georgia
- University of Louisville
- University of Tennessee Health Science Center

## NEWS

### An Increase in Training Stipends Included in Fiscal Year 2011 Budget

On February 1, 2010, President Obama released his Fiscal Year (FY) 2011 budget, and it includes a 6% increase in the amount of money allocated to training stipends. The NPA applauds President Obama for recognizing the important and essential contribution of new scientists to the U.S. research enterprise.

**Here are excerpts from the budget summary for the National Institutes of Health (NIH):**

NIH will support 17,164 Full-Time Training Positions (FTTPs), which is 92 FTTPs below the FY 2010 level. The FY 2011 provides training stipend increases of 6.0 percent or \$41.7 million over the FY 2010 level for a total dollar level of \$824.4 million. ...

Ruth L. Kirschstein National Research Service Awards:

A total of \$824.4 million, which is a 6.0 percent increase over the FY 2010, will be directed to training stipends. This increase sends a clear message to both existing and “would be” scientists that their efforts are valued.

To read the entire budget summary, [follow this link](#).

### Francis Collins Emphasizes Need for Increased Support of New Scientists

The Chronicle of Higher Education published an article on January 17, 2010 regarding an interview with the **Director of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), Francis Collins, MD, PhD**. In the article, written by Paul Basken, Dr. Collins emphasized the need for universities to provide increased funding for new scientists. Dr. Collins also expressed concern with the ongoing prob-

lem that researchers now reach an average age of 42 before receiving NIH grant funding. He said that this problem may have arisen because institutions restrict new scientists from applying for NIH grants. Read the entire article at: <http://wiredcampus.chronicle.com/article/NIH-Will-Give-LessDema/63537/>. You will need a subscription to read the article.

### Major Changes to NIH Applications

The NIH has announced significant changes to its grant application form. These changes will affect all competing applications, including new, renewal,

revision and resubmission applications. For more information, please refer to: [http://enhancing-peer-review.nih.gov/restructured\\_applications.html](http://enhancing-peer-review.nih.gov/restructured_applications.html).

### University of Massachusetts Postdoctoral Scholars Seek Unionization

Postdoctoral fellows at the University of Massachusetts are seeking unionization, according to a press release issued by the UMass PRO/UAW, a union effort organized by the United Auto Workers of America. Of the 300 postdoctoral scholars, a majority (defined as 50% plus one) has voted to unionize.

## NPA MEETING ROUND-UP

The NPA continues to provide a national voice for postdoctoral scholars. Since our inception we have represented postdocs at over 300 national and regional meetings. In addition, NPA materials have been distributed at scores of meetings. Here is a round-up of recent and upcoming activity (presented in chronological order).

### JANUARY

- Thomas Jefferson University Postdoc Seminar Series, Philadelphia, PA; “About the NPA” by Stacy L. Gelhaus, PhD, Chair, NPA Board of Directors.
- University of Pittsburgh Postdoc Association Steering Committee Meeting, Pittsburgh, PA; “About the NPA” by Gelhaus.
- 215th American Astronomical Society Meeting, Washington, D.C.; “A Mentoring Toolkit: Tips and Tools for Mentoring Early-Career Researchers” by Kathleen Flint, PhD, NPA Project Manager.
- Maine Medical Center Research Institute, Scarborough, ME; a site visit regarding the Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) by Wendy Reed Williams, PhD, NPA Member, member, 2008-2009 NPA Board of Directors.

### FEBRUARY

- Cedars Sinai Medical Center, Los Angeles, CA, NPA Team Site Visit,

Postdoc Society Meeting and Faculty Lunch; “Preparation, Research, and even Experimentation: *Finding the Right Scientific Career Path*” and “Advantages of a Postdoctoral Office” by Lisa M. Kozlowski, PhD, Associate Dean for Postdoctoral Affairs & Recruitment, Thomas Jefferson University; “Recognizing the Contributions of Postdoctoral Researchers” and “What Makes a Successful Postdoctoral Program?” by Cathee Johnson Phillips, MA, NPA Executive Director.

- American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) 2010 Annual Meeting, San Diego, CA; “RCR for Postdocs: Promoting Ethical Professional Development” by Kathleen Flint, PhD, NPA Project Manager.
- Brown University, Providence, RI; “Thinking Longterm: Incorporating the Core Competencies into the Postdoc Experience” by Johnson Phillips.