www.nationalpostdoc.org

“Providing a national voice and seeking positive change for postdocs”

A brief history of the founding of the NPA,
On behalf of the co-founders; drawn from a 2003 talk

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Assistant Professor, Harvard Medical School
Associate Neuroscientist, Brigham and Women’s Hospital

In 2003: Postdoctoral fellow, University of Chicago; Executive Board member, NPA
Why is the NPA Needed?

“The Postdoc is a category of scientists that has developed without much attention or thought”

1. To provide a unique national voice for postdocs

2. To address national issues

3. To actively and systematically support local postdoctoral associations
Specific Aims of the NPA

1. To establish a self-sustaining organization to provide a voice for postdoctoral scientists.

2. Build consensus regarding “best-practice” policies for postdocs, develop educational initiatives, and encourage their implementation.

3. Collaborate with government bodies, funding agencies and professional organizations to advocate for improvements in postdoctoral policies.
The NPA advocates for implementation of positive change in national policy

Many reports define problems, provide recommendations

Focus on a framework for implementation

Get involved! www.nationalpostdoc.org
April-

Over cheese and water at PDN 2nd annual meeting, an *ad hoc* exploratory committee of postdocs formed.

Laurel Haak, *Editor, PDN (NextWave), AAAS*

Jim Austin, *Editor, Science Careers (NextWave), AAAS*

Ric Weibl, *U.S. editor of NextWave, AAAS*

Crispin Taylor, *Editor, Nextwave, AAAS*
NPA History 2002-

April- Over cheese and water at PDN 2nd annual meeting, an ad hoc exploratory committee of postdocs formed.

July-

August-

September- Nancy Schwartz, University of Chicago, GREAT group, NPA advisory board

October-

November-
NPA History 2002-

April- Over cheese and water at PDN 2nd annual meeting, an *ad hoc* exploratory committee of postdocs formed.

July- Planning grant proposal submitted.

August- Planning Funds awarded. AAAS EHR Directorate agrees to serve as sponsor.

September- Meetings at AAAS. Pursue support (CPST, others).

November- Participation at NBER meeting (grad unions vs. PDA strategy for change)
NPA History 2002-

**November**- Final Business Plan submitted.

**December**– Funding approved by Alfred P. Sloan Foundation (450K).

Michael Teitelbaum

Shirley Malcolm
NPA History - 2003

January 2003 - Steering Committee meets in Washington, DC

AAAS
NIH
NSF
GREAT
NRC/NAS
(COSEPUP)

February 2003 - www.nationalpostdoc.org goes live in PLONE
AAAS business meeting, affiliates meeting
Postdoctoral associations

March 2003 - Inaugural meeting, a Constitutional Convention
Ratified Constitution and By-Laws!

Geoff Davis,
Geoffdavis.net,
Sigma Xi,
(now Google)
1. The NPA is a collaborative organization.

Postdocs and nonpostdocs are welcome to contribute to NPA initiatives.

Seeking collaborations with:
- individual postdocs
- postdoctoral associations
- government bodies
- funding agencies
- professional organizations and societies
2. The NPA requires a sustainable structure.

**Sustainability**
- Executive Board: Staggered terms, local and national experience
- Executive Director: Organizational memory
- Advisory Board: Faculty and former postdocs
- Funding: Diversified revenue

**Governance**
- Activities governed by democratic mandate from its membership
  - via an elected Executive Board
- Administered by an Executive Director
3. The NPA actively pursues inter-related, innovative educational initiatives.

Postdoctoral Outreach Program (POP)
- Postdoc Association Formation and Development
- National Postdoctoral Survey

Postdoctoral Policy Development
- Use all intellectual resources of Postdoc Associations
- Implementation strategies
Sam Castaneda,
UC Berkeley
NPA founders, 1st annual meeting

Carol Manahan
Orfeu Buxton
Karen Christopherson

Avi Spier
Claudina Stevenson
Arti Patel
Raymond Clark
NPA founders,  
1st annual meeting
NPA Board & some advisors
Inaugural annual meeting 2003

NPA advisory board members
Geoff Davis
Laurel Haak
Roz Orkin
Timothy Coetzee
Phillip Clifford
Joan Schwartz
Advisors
Eleanor Babco, PhD.
Sam Castaneda
Philip Clifford, Ph.D.
Timothy Coetzee, PhD.
Geoff Davis, PhD.
Laurel Haak, PhD
Roslyn Orkin, PhD.
Trevor Penning, PhD.
Nancy Schwartz, PhD.
Joan Schwartz, PhD.

Supporters
Jean Fort, PhD., UC CGDC Postdoc Pol.
Susan Rich, Dir. Office Postdoc Ed., Emory SOM
John Russell, PhD., Washington University SOM
John Vaughn, PhD., Exec. Vice President AAU
U of California Postdoc Council
Stanford University Provost’s Com. on Postdocs
Johns Hopkins SOM Postdoctoral Association
NCI CCR-FYI Association, NIH
Scripps Research Inst., Society of Fellows
Stanford University Postdoctoral Association
University of Chicago, Bio Sci. Division PDA

Funded by:
A.P. Sloan Foundation

Sponsor:
AAAS, EHR Directorate
AAAS meeting Feb 2003

Crispin Taylor, NextWave

Carol Manahan, Johns Hopkins, 1st NPA chair

Shirley Malcolm, AAAS, 1st NPA grant “PI”

Eleanor Babco, CPST, NPA advisor, collaborator
NPA leaders meet at NIH, 2003

Laurel Haake
Elias Zerhouni, *NIH Director*

Geoff Davis

Photo credit: Joan Schwartz, *NIH extramural training office*, NPA advisory board
Issue & Perspectives

Postdoc Production: Negative Selection of the Scientists of the Future?

Postdocs are nearly qualified research scientists, free from the restrictions of the graduate school from which they came and the administrative burdens of faculty positions to which many aspire. As the National Academies' Committee on Science, Engineering, and Public Policy wrote recently, "Postdocs are central to this nation's global leadership in science and engineering. It is largely they who carry out the sometimes exhilarating, sometimes tedious daily-to-day work of research. It is largely they who account for the extraordinary productivity of science and engineering research in the United States. Many among them will discover fundamental new knowledge." (1)

Postdocs are a population of individuals that has stumped between the cracks of the recognized workforce of the scientific community. Not graduate students, not faculty members, and not staff scientists, the roughly 50,000 postdocs in the United States are an undefined, heterogeneous group of "apprentice" scientists. In the majority of cases postdocs do not benefit from the parity of employment conditions of other scientists; they generally do not have well-defined expectations of employment rights, pay commensurate with experience and education, or even normalized pay scales. In addition, often there are no performance evaluations, only no pension plans and other employment benefits (such as health insurance) afforded to other workers at the same institution, or procedures for resolving problems. And common their opportunities for career progression are limited.

"If the postdoc position was considered a regular job, the security and status issues would diminish, as the researcher would benefit from the usual employee rights and benefits in the work environment."

Science Careers, 2001
Give postdocs a career, not empty promises

To avoid throwing talent on the scrap heap and to boost prospects, a new type of scientific post for researchers is needed, says Jennifer Rohn.

The career structure for scientific research in universities is broken, particularly in the life sciences, my own overcrowded field. In coffee rooms across the world, postdocs commiserate with each other amid rising anxiety about biology’s dirty little secret: dwindling opportunity. Fellowships are few, every advertised academic post draws a flood of candidates, and grants fund only a tiny fraction of applicants.

The scientific job market has been tight for decades, but the recent global recession and accompanying austerity measures have brought it into sudden focus for young — and some not so young — researchers, who face a widening chasm between their cycles of contract work and a coveted lab-head position.

That most lab heads want the best for their many apprentices, but at the system level, the practice continues. Few academics could afford to warn trainees against entering the ring — if they frightened away their labour force, research would grind to a halt.

An alternative career structure within science that professionalizes mature postdocs would be better. Permanent research staff positions could be generated and filled with talented and experienced postdocs who do not want to, or cannot, lead a research team — a job that, after all, requires a different skill set. Every academic lab could employ a few of these staff along with a reduced number of trainees. Although the permanent staff would cost more, there would be fewer needed: a researcher with 10–20 years experience is probably at least twice as