19th Annual National Postdoctoral Association Conference

Cleveland, Ohio
Creating Community for Postdocs, Spouses, Partners and their Families
SPEAKERS

Rita Brown
Instructor
Designing Your Life in the United States
University of California, Berkeley
rita.maria.brown@gmail.com

Sam Castaneda
Director, Visiting Scholar and Postdoc Affairs Program
University of California, Berkeley
samc@berkeley.edu

Laetitia Georgina Elisabeth Wilkins
Postdoctoral Scholar
Department of Environmental Science, Policy and Management: Ecosystem Science
University of California, Berkeley
@M_helvetiae
WHY DO WE NEED AN ASSOCIATION FOR PARENTS?

For postdocs with children (especially from abroad) these stresses can be compounded by:

- Language/cultural differences/unfamiliar foods
- A complicated health system
- Questions about the American educational system
- Childcare and loss of a stable community for their children

Anything that adds to stress outside the lab, impacts quality of life and productivity inside the lab!
WHAT IS BSPPA?

The Berkeley Spouses, Partners and Parents Association (BSPPA) is a community of volunteers drawn from postdocs, visiting scholars and visiting student researchers and their partners/spouses and family at UC Berkeley.

- UC Berkeley attracts researchers and their families from all over the world (more than 70% come from abroad) with diverse backgrounds, cultures, and identities. Most of them are accompanied by their spouses/partners and their children

- BSPPA helps this community to find each other so as to overcome shared challenges and make the most of their adventure

- Creates a more welcoming and inclusive environment which helps to attract the best researchers
WHAT DOES BSPPA DO?

Organizes regularized meetings, events and workshops to:

- Demonstrate how BSPPA can assist with common challenges, e.g., school registration for children, finding a local doctor, etc.
- Organize social events and family friendly events
- Organize shared child care
- Provide access to career advice for partners and spouses
- Provide volunteering and adult education opportunities
Navigating the U.S. healthcare system is a great challenge -- even for Americans. If you bring family with you from abroad, the spouse or partner is suddenly responsible for organizing health care for the whole family in a system that is foreign.

The BSPPA:

- Organizes events featuring speakers from insurance providers and other experts who are able to explain the local health care system, their coverage, and how to communicate effectively with healthcare professionals
- Provides handouts for useful resources that are subsequently posted on the BSPPA website
- Provides recommendations for local health care providers who have a history of serving the postdoc community
Childcare in the Bay Area is extremely expensive and these costs are sometimes prohibitive. Moreover, leaving your children with foreign and unrelated people might be emotionally challenging.

BSPPA has:

- Compiled a list of affordable options of childcare -- only including options that have been officially recognized by the City of Berkeley and reviewed by other parents
- Organized a group of volunteers from the BSPPA community to take turns watching each other's children
SOCIAL EVENTS

With Children
- Spring potluck and picnic parties
- American holiday events, e.g., Halloween, Easter egg hunts
- Excursions to local museums and botanical gardens
- Craft parties

Adults Only
- Wine tasting
- Visiting other university campuses
- Job fairs
- Leisure activities
- Yoga
In order for our events to be successful, BSPPA follows these simple, but important rules:

- Hold regular monthly meetings in the same space making it easy for the participants to remember where to meet. An attractive space, if possible, makes the community members feel welcome. Provide healthy, free food every time

- Listen to the community's challenges and needs in order to organize events accordingly.

- Invite partners, children and other family members to our events.

- Everyone should feel welcome

- Bring toys and let children play during the event

- Ask attendees to sign up in advance
HOW TO GET STARTED

● Connect with your campus postdoc affairs office for logistical and funding support

● Create an association website and keep it up to date. This includes the uploading of useful materials and resources

● Communicate events through a web site calendar

● Email List - Maintain an up-to-date email list and send out emails on a weekly basis with all the information combined in one email. This protocol minimizes spam and maximizes informational content

● Reach out to similar programs at other universities and ask for advice.

● Replicate the BSPPA at other institutions
Welcome to the University of California Berkeley Spouses, Partners & Parents Association (BSPPA) Website. BSPPA is a volunteer association that supports the families of postdocs, visiting scholars, and visiting graduate researchers. We organize social and informational events and assemble resources based on our collective experiences. BSPPA is here to serve our community, so please contact us if you have any questions, comments, or concerns.

Join our team! If you want to support your community, meet like-minded people, and shape the priorities and direction of BSPPA, we invite you to join the BSPPA Board. For more information, please see the about page or simply talk to us at any BSPPA event.

BSPPA Events
Designing your life in the United States
OVERVIEW

The International Transition – motivations, hopes, fears, settling in the U.S.

Cultural Intelligence and American Values – self-awareness

Living in the U.S. and Berkeley – local resources

Intercultural and Transparent Communication – cultural, physical and emotional awareness

Culture Shock and Adjustment – becoming familiar with the process and its challenges

Translating Skills and Interests – identifying innate capacities and where to apply them

Networking, Job Search and Volunteering – updating, practicing and local resources

Action Plan and Conclusion – vision and practical next steps
COURSE OBJECTIVE

To provide information and practical tools and to share experiences in order for participants to create a thriving life in the U.S.
Expand self awareness about international transitions to create a vision for a successful stay
Better understand cultural intelligence and American values
Learn about resources available to create a life in Berkeley and beyond
Assess the impact of language and different communication styles
Learn about emotional intelligence, culture shock and build confidence in how to respond to it
Learn about volunteering opportunities, coping with stress, and best networking practices
Translate skills to rebuild a sense of belonging and identity
Create a plan to act on their personal vision
HOW FAMILIES TEND TO RESPOND TO A NEW CULTURE

- With resiliency and strength
- At different rates
- Split evaluation of the move
- Split evaluation of the home and host cultures
- Direct vs. indirect expression of pain

Source: The Interchange Institute
INTERCULTURAL CHALLENGES THAT SPOUSES AND PARTNERS OFTEN FACE

- Loss of knowledge of social norms
- Loss of majority status and sense of belonging
- Challenge to values
- Change in family boundaries
- Loss of ability to communicate
- Social isolation and withdrawal
- Being homesick
- Depression
- Stress of doing practical tasks
- Stress of being misperceived
- Loss of identity

- Navigating a competitive house market
- Waiting for a work permit when finances are low
- Stress of entering a foreign job market
- Caring for children 24/7
- Not finding time to nurture themselves
- Craving specific foods from their home countries
- Loss of support systems:
  - Education, transportation, healthcare, political, economic, etc.

‘I’ve experienced culture shock symptoms for the last year.’
~ Iranian BSPPA workshop participant
COURSE RESOURCES TO ADDRESS CHALLENGES

The course allows for a safe space to share experiences.

Participants:

Are invited to be vulnerable, real, and care for one another

Quickly bond with each other and start exchanging contacts and scheduling events among themselves

Explore preferred cultural values and communication styles, as well as what in general can be expected of U.S. culture

Strengthen their self-awareness and become increasingly empathetic towards themselves and others
COURSE RESOURCES TO ADDRESS CHALLENGES

The course:

Assesses participants’ level of flexibility, acceptance of differences and willingness to take risks and make mistakes

Improves listening skills, observation, and the ability to withhold judgment and not act on stereotypes

Shares a wealth of information and intercultural theories and frameworks grounded in research

Offers adjustment tips throughout the course, e.g., importance of exercising and keeping a positive attitude

Reinforces being supportive of their spouse/partner, establishing a local network, strengthening English language skills

Each class is followed by lunch with further opportunities to socialize.
A SNAPSHOT OF THE SESSIONS

Before

Lack of self-awareness about cultural conditioning and how it shapes behaviors and affects their life in the US

Lack of full clarity and coherence regarding their vision for their time here

Primarily focused on logistics of the relocation to the expense of overlooking internal dynamics and feelings
A SNAPSHOT OF THE SESSIONS

During

Invitation to:

Open their minds and hearts
Develop greater patience, empathy and self-awareness
Engage in active listening
Be more curious than judgmental
Assume positive intentions and be increasingly vulnerable and authentic
Engage in community building and take responsibility for creating their own future
A SNAPSHOT OF THE SESSIONS

After

Greater connection to one another and feeling part of a greater community

Sense of empowerment to try different things and make mistakes

More self-aware regarding personality, values, interests, and transferable skills

Improved understanding about how to update and adapt resumes, cover letters and biographies to a more American-friendly style

Clarity around the greater purpose of work and volunteering

More confident to network and clearly articulate what they want to do

Greater confidence to pursue their dreams
Thank You!