The postdoctoral years are when the greatest numbers of women, relative to men, leave the academic career path. “...at every academic career milestone the proportion of women in science and engineering declines. ...In examining the transition into academic positions... the declines are greatest in fields requiring a period of postdoctoral study” – National Research Council, Beyond Bias and Barriers: Fulfilling the Potential of Women in Academic Science and Engineering (2007)

Why Do Postdoc Women Leave Academia?

Top Reason #1: Family Formation

• Postdoc women are more likely than men to cite issues relating to children as important in their career decisions. [3][4][5]
• Postdoc women are more likely than men to make career concessions for their partner/spouse, who is often also in academia. [4]
• Postdoc women with children are: • More likely than men, and women without children, to opt against professor/PI career path; [5] and • Less likely than men, and women without children, to get their first tenure-track job. [5][6]

Top Reason #2: Isolation and Lack of Confidence

• Postdoc women are less confident than postdoc men that they will obtain a PI position and tenure, despite both feeling their preparation is adequate. [4]
• Other reasons noted for changing career goal from professor/PI:
  • Feelings of isolation and alienation. [5]
  • Lack of encouragement, mentoring and role models. [5][7]

References:


Visit www.nationalpostdoc.org/advance for more gender data on postdocs

What is NPA ADVANCE?

NPA ADVANCE is a National Postdoctoral Association (NPA) project to adapt and disseminate promising institutional practices for assisting postdoc women to transition to the professoriate. NPA ADVANCE is funded by the National Science Foundation.

Join us for a workshop on “NPA ADVANCE: Facilitating the Advancement of Postdoc Women at Your Institution.” Saturday morning, 9-10:30am, in NCC Conference Room F

Retaining Postdocs in the Academic Career Pipeline:

What can POSTDOCS do?

Postdocs can also take charge of their own careers by doing their homework and strengthening their professional and career development.
• Do your homework.
  • Choose the best-fitting institution for you, which means look at, e.g., benefits, services, mentoring & networking opportunities.
  • Make a career plan (and backup plan).
  • Try to think long-term, especially if a visa is involved.
  • Where possible, consider how family issues may impact your plan. For example:
    • "Dual-career" concerns? Discuss with your partner/spouse in advance your options for job searching as a couple.
    • Maternity leave? Review your options for both continuing your research and getting paid while on leave.
    • Find multiple mentors, in addition to your PI.
    • Enhance your professional network.

Retaining Postdocs in the Academic Career Pipeline:

What can INSTITUTIONS do?

Institutions already play an important role in advancing postdoc women’s careers. The following are some key practices considered particularly beneficial for assisting these women to transition from postdoc to academic faculty positions.

MENTORING
• Treat, and reward, mentoring as a “core” part of research.
• Offer structured mentoring programs to provide assistance in identifying additional mentors outside of a postdoc’s PI. Including mentoring training.

PROFESSIONAL & CAREER DEVELOPMENT
• Professional development can strengthen postdocs’ preparation for the academic career search. Some training programs that are of particular benefit to postdoc women are:
  • Negotiating, Networking, Grant Writing, Research & Career Planning.

FAMILY-FRIENDLY POLICIES & BENEFITS
• Provide clear guidance on family-friendly policies and practices in order to avoid case-by-case implementation, especially where there are differences by postdoc funding source. For example:
  • Maternity/parental leave guidelines, including paid and unpaid leave options for postdocs; and
  • Flexible work arrangements.
• Provide assistance to postdocs where possible, for example:
  • On-site childcare services and portable childcare subsidies usable at any eligible childcare service; and
  • Offer to postdoc recruits any job-search assistance available for “dual-career” academic couples.
• Consider “permanently” hiring your own postdocs, which can help some postdoc “dual-career” couple’s geographical constraints.
• Include postdocs in any institution-wide assessment of climate for women; get to know your Title IX coordinator on your campus.

Questions?

Visit the NPA ADVANCE Web site for additional information or contact the NPA ADVANCE project manager for technical assistance on issues relating to postdoc women. www.nationalpostdoc.org/advance or email: kflint@nationalpostdoc.org

This material is based upon work supported by the National Science Foundation under Grant No. 0819994, via an ADVANCE Partnerships for Adaptation, Implementation, and Dissemination (PAD) Award. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation.