2016 Postdoc Survey

Help the Postdoc Executive Committee advocate for you!
Fill out this year’s Postdoc Survey!

RESPONDENTS CAN ENTER TO WIN
A $50 AMAZON GIFT CARD!

The survey examines multiple areas of postdoc life, including lab environment, family and housing support, salary/finances, and career development.

Find the survey at: https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/PF53QYJ
OR
Scan the QR Code below and do the survey on any mobile device!

Housing
Mentorship
Career Development
Childcare
Salary
Benefits

QR Code Reader app can be found at https://scan.me/download
(iPhone, Android and Windows versions)
Dream yourself onto the beach of Capri. The sun is warming your shoulders, the translucent ocean is cooling your toes, while you are walking in the shadows of cypresses and pines. You are on your way to the colorful houses of the village nearby to get yourself a limoncello gelato – the first one in your life.

It does not come as a surprise that taking a holiday in a novel environment is ranked among the most rewarding life experiences. 645 billion dollars are spent annually on holidays in the USA alone. Holidays make us happy, and in face of increasing reports of depression, anything that makes us feel good is worth studying.

Ample scientific evidence reveals how the brain benefits from prolonged sojourns in an enriched environment. After two to four weeks, prefrontal cortical serotonin levels rise. Stress resilience is enhanced and persists after the end of the vacation. Synaptic plasticity is increased, which is not only related to new spatial learning but it may even help ameliorate neurodegeneration. However, with 15 days of holiday per year for Sinai postdocs, who has time to wait that long?

Turns out you may not have to. The nucleus accumbens, a key area of the brain’s reward system, shows increased synaptic plasticity after as little as 24h in a “holiday paradigm”. Not only is the density and morphology of dendritic spines, the sites where learning occurs, altered – mice that have been housed for a day in what is their own version of Disneyland, respond differently to drugs and, importantly, they show fewer symptoms of depression.

With approximately 50% of academics suffering from depression, we should start applying this strategy to ourselves. Taking time to explore new places for a few days or a long weekend should be a matter of mental hygiene. For full benefits though, you may need to give your brain a break for up to a month. Workers with limited chances for leisurely vacation are more likely to exhibit symptoms of depression. With depression being the leading cause of disability at work worldwide, it should be in the interest of employers to make it happen.

References:
What is your name?
Reed Shabman

What is the name and approximate size of company you work for?

What is your current title?
Assistant Professor

What graduate degree(s) have you received?
Ph.D. in Microbiology and Immunology from UNC-Chapel Hill (2008). Postdoctoral training from 2008-2013 at The Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai.

What city and state do you work in?
Rockville, Maryland

Did you hold any other positions between your current job and your postdoc?
No, I went from my postdoc to JCVI.

Can you give us a brief (2-3 sentence) description of your current position?
The goal of my current work is to understand the interplay between viruses and their hosts. Knowledge from this work will aid in the development of successful vaccines and therapeutics to counteract virus infection. I have projects in the following areas:
- Developing assays to understand viral innate immune evasion strategies
- Collaborative efforts to develop next generation sequencing (NGS) platforms across multiple virus families
- Utilizing NGS for virus discovery
- Collaborative efforts to design and test vaccine platforms that protect against RNA virus infection

What did you learn during your PhD/postdoc that is most helpful to you in your current position?
Mount Sinai taught me the valuable lesson to work hard but also work smart. In other words, know how much time to spend on a certain project before publishing your findings and to always be thinking about the next opportunity that interests you.

What was the most important event or factor that contributed to your transition into an alternative career outside academia?
NIH paylines and the large number of highly qualified postdocs that want to go into academia. To be blunt, without a K grant or other funding in hand, the cards are stacked against you for landing an academic job. With that said, JCVI requires me to write for grants and contracts. However, JCVI provided me with an opportunity to be successful in the absence of preexisting funding. I think there are jobs in government, industry, and nonprofit sectors that allow postdocs to bridge the gap between academic and product driven research.

How many hours a week do you spend in meetings?
Probably 5 hours/week.

Approximately how many hours do you work per week?
I try to work 9-5 Monday-Friday since I have two small children. However, I often do my writing/emailing at night or early in the morning.

How frequently do you work in the evenings and/or on the weekends?
I work one to two nights per week for a couple of hours. I’m always around email (unfortunately) since my bosses are always discussing upcoming plans by email.

What, if anything, do you miss about being a postdoc?
I miss the ability to spend the required time to think about biological questions in sufficient detail. Chris (my Sinai mentor) and I maintain a great relationship and still work together. I’d advise to always maintain a good relationship with your mentors since their support can really help you succeed even after you leave their lab.
On a scale of 1-10 (1=low, 10=high), how much autonomy do you have in your current position?
8. I have a lot of independence at JCVI. However, the majority of my support is directly linked to grants and contracts I obtain. This is a challenge but also gives me control of my schedule.

Does your position require that you travel? If/when you travel, how long is your trip?
I do have to travel. We have another building in California (near UCSD). I also have to travel for meetings funded by the grants/contracts I'm on. I have been at the job just over two years, and travel ~4 times a year. I try to keep the trips short since I have two small children at home.

Do you work with other people and/or in a team? If so, please describe the circumstances and structure of your group work.
All my work is in a team. I work with a postdoc and 3-4 technicians. I also work closely with the informatics group (~6 people). Most of our work revolves around next generation sequencing and analysis. So, I need to be involved in both the lab work and computer work.

How did you learn to do your job?
A lot of my job I learned to do on the fly. With that said, having a good understanding of your expertise (for me its virology and NGS) allows you to apply this knowledge to the specifics of the job. I think this is true for a lot of jobs beyond your postdoc. I did get a lot of help with building budgets on grants/contracts at JCVI. I’d advise all postdocs to ask to manage their PI’s budgets (if they let them). For any management position, it is critical to be able to plan your expenses and labor allocations.

What is the average salary range for your position?
This is a hard one to answer because my job is somewhat unusual. I would say between $75,000-115,000.

Greetings fellow postdocs!

We hope that you’ve been taking advantage of the nice weather lately. This month, the Postdoc Executive Committee (PEC) has been hard at work preparing the 2016 Annual Postdoc Survey, to be released this week! Please take 15-20 minutes to fill out the Annual Postdoc Survey and help the PEC and the entire ISMMS postdoc community! In order to affect change at our institution, we need to have sufficient numbers to back it up. So, whether you’re loving your time as an ISMMS postdoc or have ideas for improvements, we NEED to hear from you! Once you’ve completed the anonymous survey, please encourage 3 postdocs outside of you lab to complete it and tell them to spread the word to 3 more postdocs!

Additionally, as discussed last month, the PEC, and the Offices of the Ombuds, Postdoctoral Affairs, and Student Affairs have established a set of mistreatment guidelines to supplement the institutional policy on harassment and grievances, assist in developing and maintaining optimal training environments, and encourage mentors and postdocs alike to accept their responsibilities as representatives of ISMMS in their interactions with colleagues and staff. The forthcoming Mis-treatment Resource Panel will provide a neutral board for postdocs (and grad students) to voice their concerns and is meant to supplement the Ombudsperson, who will also sit on the panel. The panel will consist of 6 postdocs and 4 faculty, and the call for nominations for postdocs to serve the panel has been announced. Elected positions are open to both junior and senior postdocs from both basic science and clinical/translational departments. This is a great way to get involved and obtain rewarding leadership experience!

To run for a position as a member of the resource panel and serve as an elected representative of the postdoc body to improve the ISMMS training experience, email a ~250 word summary about yourself and why you are interested in serving to ISMMSpostdoc@gmail.com. Please identify if your research is basic, clinical, or translational. The top candidates will be selected by the PEC and subsequent elections will be conducted via email survey by July 1.

We hope that these efforts of the PEC and Mount Sinai leadership will make ISMMS a safer and happier environment for all postdocs!

Alison

Alison P. Sanders and Delaine K. Ceholski are your PEC Co-Chairs