

Many graduate students, particularly in science and engineering fields, decide to work as postdoctoral fellows before pursuing permanent employment. The insights and tips below were collected from postdoctoral fellows in all stages of training in multiple sectors (academia, nonprofits, and corporations) in multiple disciplines (life science, social science, and engineering). Thank you to the postdoctoral fellows who contributed to this handout.

Getting Started

Assess the benefits and downsides of doing a postdoc:

- Benefits could include more publications, extra time before permanent employment, enhancing the CV, open-ended learning, and career option exploration.
- Downsides could include not as much freedom, salary, or respect as career positions and delays entry into permanent workforce.
- Talk to partner and/or significant others early in the process

Determine the focus and purpose of a postdoc position:

- Continue research similar to graduate work
- Use postdoc position as springboard to slightly different area
- Acquire new skills by doing a postdoc position in an area unrelated to your graduate work
- Engineering – industry postdoc could be good for academic job search
- Social science – hard to move from industry to academia

Will location be a factor?

- Consider leaving the UW to get a different perspective
- Move to a place where you'll meet lots of individuals who could be helpful to your future
- Try working in a different sector – corporate, nonprofit, government
- Be honest with yourself about where you'll be willing to live

Finding Positions

- Network, ask around
- Read professional association websites and newsletters
- Present at and attend conferences and meetings
- Advisers can give ideas and advocate for you
- Connect with people who give lectures at the UW
- Email departments or deans of interest, even if they don't have positions posted
- Approach individuals who are publishing interesting research in journals

When to Apply and How to Stand Out

When to apply:

- Begin networking now! It's never too early or too late to start looking!
- Start looking about 8-12 months before you finish your PhD
- Depends on funding schedule—for many grants, you have to apply before you've been a PhD a full year

How to stand out:

- Craft an application that shows you are creative and productive
- Submit an abstract or two of projects you want to work on
- Consider mailing your application via FedEx (cover letter, CV, abstracts)
- Show what you can bring to the table, how you can further lines of investigation, how your skills match their projects, how you might bring a different perspective, etc.
- Personalize and polish your materials before sending them
- Apply to at least 3 positions, or more than 10 if applying to competitive labs

Finding the Right Fit

Assess lab culture and atmosphere:

- Figure out how your personality meshes with that of the PI
- Assess whether the PI is interested in your ideas/projects or just wants you to do his/her work
- Talk to students and postdocs in labs – take them to lunch
- Analyze their publication, presentation, and funding records (PubMed, NIH, etc)
- Inquire about authorship rules and assignments in the lab
- Ask other departments at the school/company about the lab's reputation
- Will a mentor in the lab provide you with direction, leadership, networking and cheerleading? (and co-authoring without stealing first authorship?)
- Will a mentor in the lab let you do your own work and achieve goals?

Salary and funding:

- Ranges widely (\$36K – \$98K)
- Very helpful to get your own funding
- Apply for postdoc and early career professional grants
- Have a well formulated “career development plan” (see NIH/NSF Individual Development Plan)

Duration of postdoc position:

- Social science – usually 1-2 years
- Science – usually 3-6 years
- Sometimes universities have a 5 year cutoff

Putting the Pieces Together

Getting your PhD Adviser on board:

- Land a position, then adviser will see you have marketable skills and will let you graduate
- Thesis committee can also convince adviser to let you go, as does landing a postdoc pre-defense

Review the offer letter and understand expectations:

- Make sure it has great detail to reduce future surprises
- Expected responsibilities
- Evaluation methods – 6 month 12 month written feedback
- Expectations for publications and grant applications (e.g. 1-2 publications per year 1 grant application per year)

While on the Job as a Postdoc

- Continue gaining teaching experience by covering sabbatical replacements, co-teaching a class, or asking a department for opportunities to teach
- Look for opportunities to gain additional skills
- Try to work through any problems with your PI
- Take advantage of resources available to postdocs at the organization or university

Resources for Finding Postdocs

UW Resources:

- <http://depts.washington.edu/uwpa/>
- <http://depts.washington.edu/pdafrs/index.html>
- <http://www.lib.washington.edu/gfis/>
- <http://www.grad.washington.edu/students/fa/index.shtml>

Other Resources—Many Disciplines:

- <http://gsasgrants.fas.harvard.edu/pdg.cgi>
- <http://web.mit.edu/career/www/infostats/respostdoc.html>
- <http://www.gdnet.ucla.edu/grpinst.htm>
- <http://www.socfell.fas.harvard.edu/>
- <http://see.orau.org/>
- <http://www.cos.com/>
- <http://www.theleadershipalliance.org>
- <http://www.rwjf.org/>
- <http://www.nationalpostdoc.org/>

Other Resources—Science, Medicine & Engineering:

- <http://biocareers.com/>
- <http://www.nationalacademies.org/grantprograms.html>
- <http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/funding>
- <http://grants.nih.gov/training/index.htm>
- <http://www.gene.com/gene/research/postdoctoral/index.html>
- <http://www.hhwf.org/>
- <http://bwfund.org>
- <http://www.lsrp.org/>
- <http://www.lilly.com/careers/students/postdoc/default.html>
- <http://www.nigms.nih.gov/Research/>
- <http://millerinstitute.berkeley.edu/>
- http://www.damonrunyon.org/for_scientists/categories/category/awards/
- <http://www.wi.mit.edu/>
- <https://scholarships.uncf.org/>
- http://www.rit.edu/academicaffairs/facultyrecruitment/faculty_program.php