

The Postdoc Press

University of Chicago
Biological Sciences Division
Postdoctoral Association

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The BSD PDA - Helping to serve, promote, and explore postdoc interests since 1999

National Postdoc Survey: UChicago Summary Data

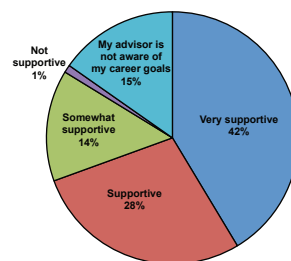
In 2016, the Survey Committee led by Sean McConnell¹, Erica Westerman¹, and Joe Pierre² developed and launched the **National Postdoc Survey (NPS)**, collecting data on over 7,600 postdocs across the US. The purpose of the survey was to gather data on the postdoctoral experience including demographics, career plans, and mentoring impact. Significantly, the last comprehensive national survey of postdocs was the Sigma Xi, "Doctors without Orders" report published in 2005, which was a major inspiration for launch of the NPS last year. After the NPS closed, institutions with over 50 responses received summary reports, addressed to Postdoctoral Associations (PDAs) and university leadership. The goal of the summary reports was to give each PDA and university leader a snapshot of the experiences of their postdocs, which can be used to compare with national benchmarks, as well as examine and implement policy changes. In addition, twelve travel award winners were randomly selected among postdocs who completed the survey. As mentioned in the **April issue of this publication**, Sean and Joe presented NPS data at the National Postdoctoral Association annual meeting poster session. The NPS Research Team is currently submitting a manuscript to a multidisciplinary journal for peer review.

From the University of Chicago, 204 postdocs contributed data to the survey, approximately 30-40% of the total population. UChicago postdocs are overwhelmingly satisfied (90%) with professional development opportunities here. This is not surprising since the BSD PDA, myCHOICE, and UChicago GRAD offer a wide-range of programming. Across the nation, 80% of postdocs responded that they were satisfied with the institution's professional development opportunities, indicating that the majority of institutions are providing adequate professional development. Responses on the relationship between postdocs and their PIs were also highlighted. First, 70% of UChicago postdocs reported that their advisor was either "very supportive" or "supportive" of their primary career plan, see pie chart #1. However, a surprisingly high percentage, 15% said that their advisor was not aware of their career goals. Furthermore, the majority of UChicago postdocs (63%) reported that they are either "very satisfied" or "satisfied" with the mentorship that they receive (see pie chart #2). Although thirteen percent were either not very or not at all satisfied, this percentage is somewhat lower than 18% of postdocs nationally. Overall, UChicago postdocs report enjoying the diverse professional development opportunities offered, but examination of mentor impact revealed that more work is needed to strengthen and develop these relationships, particularly when it comes to career planning and goals.

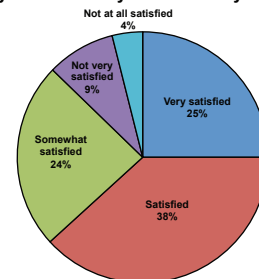
¹Dr. Westerman is now Assistant Professor at the University of Arkansas, ²Dr. Pierre is now Assistant Professor at the University of Tennessee Health Sciences Center

UChicago Survey Data

How supportive of your career plan is your advisor?



How satisfied are you with the mentoring that you receive in your laboratory?

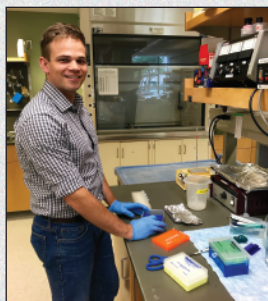


Postdoc Spotlight: Justin Luebke

Lab: Sean Crosson **Department:** Biochemistry & Molecular Biology **PDA Position:** University Affairs Chair

What is your research focus? Bacteria have to respond to ever-changing environmental conditions. One way in which they accomplish this is through sensory proteins that trigger signal transduction pathways. I study the molecular and structural mechanisms of a particular signal transduction system in a bacterial stress response pathway called the general stress response (GSR). The regulatory proteins comprising this system are widely conserved across the diverse Alphaproteobacteria clade ranging from the freshwater organism *Caulobacter crescentus* to the zoonotic intracellular pathogen *Brucella abortus*, both of which I work on. Proper regulation of the GSR is required for stress adaptation and host-microbe interactions. My work focuses on understanding how post-translational modifications and protein-protein interactions contribute to conformational changes of the regulatory proteins in this system that result in changes in global gene regulation.

What have you done to enhance your postdoctoral training experience at UChicago? During my postdoc I have taken an active leadership role in the Postdoc Association (PDA) and have participated in many professional development opportunities through myCHOICE and UChicagoGRAD. In particular, the myCHOICE BSD Alumni Career Forum introduced me to former UChicago PhDs and postdocs and provided a great opportunity to expand my professional network beyond my day-to-day research. I had been increasingly interested in utilizing my scientific background to advance academic research beyond the university. At the Career Forum I ended up meeting Thelma Tennant, Assistant Director of Technology Commercialization and Licensing at the **Polsky Center** at UChicago. When she explained the function of the office and her role, I realized she was describing exactly the career track I was looking for. Thelma recommended keeping an eye out for internships in the office and roughly a year later, the TechStart Internship Program was announced and I was accepted. In the internship, I worked with Margaret Fleetwood, a Project Manager in the office. The TechStart Internship proved to be a valuable experience where I learned to evaluate university-derived inventions, identify potential products, generate detailed descriptions of the technology, and prepare marketing materials. The skill and experience gained will be carried forward in my career and I highly recommend postdocs utilize the resources available through the PDA, myCHOICE and UChicagoGRAD.



Postdoc Family Friendly Event

This month, UChicagoGRAD and the BSD PDA teamed up to host the first family-focused postdoc event on campus - an afternoon snack and craft time. The children had fun coloring and making paper 'rocketships' and attaching them to straws to see how far they could make them fly.

"Our postdoc family craft afternoon, in collaboration with the BSD PDA, was such a natural way to assist in supporting postdocs, and their families, from across campus! UChicagoGRAD is a resource for all postdocs at UChicago, although many don't know that, so I'm happy that this fun event was one step towards further engagement with our postdoc community. Look for more events from our office in the future," said Briana Konnick, Assistant Director, Graduate Career Development at UChicagoGRAD.

If you are interested in learning about the Social Committee please contact us at

bsdpostdoc@gmail.com.
Check out our website for info on upcoming social events.



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