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# Minority Graduate Scholarship Programs 2015 Webinar Series

## Choosing the Right Postdoctoral Position

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# CHOOSING THE RIGHT POSTDOC POSITION

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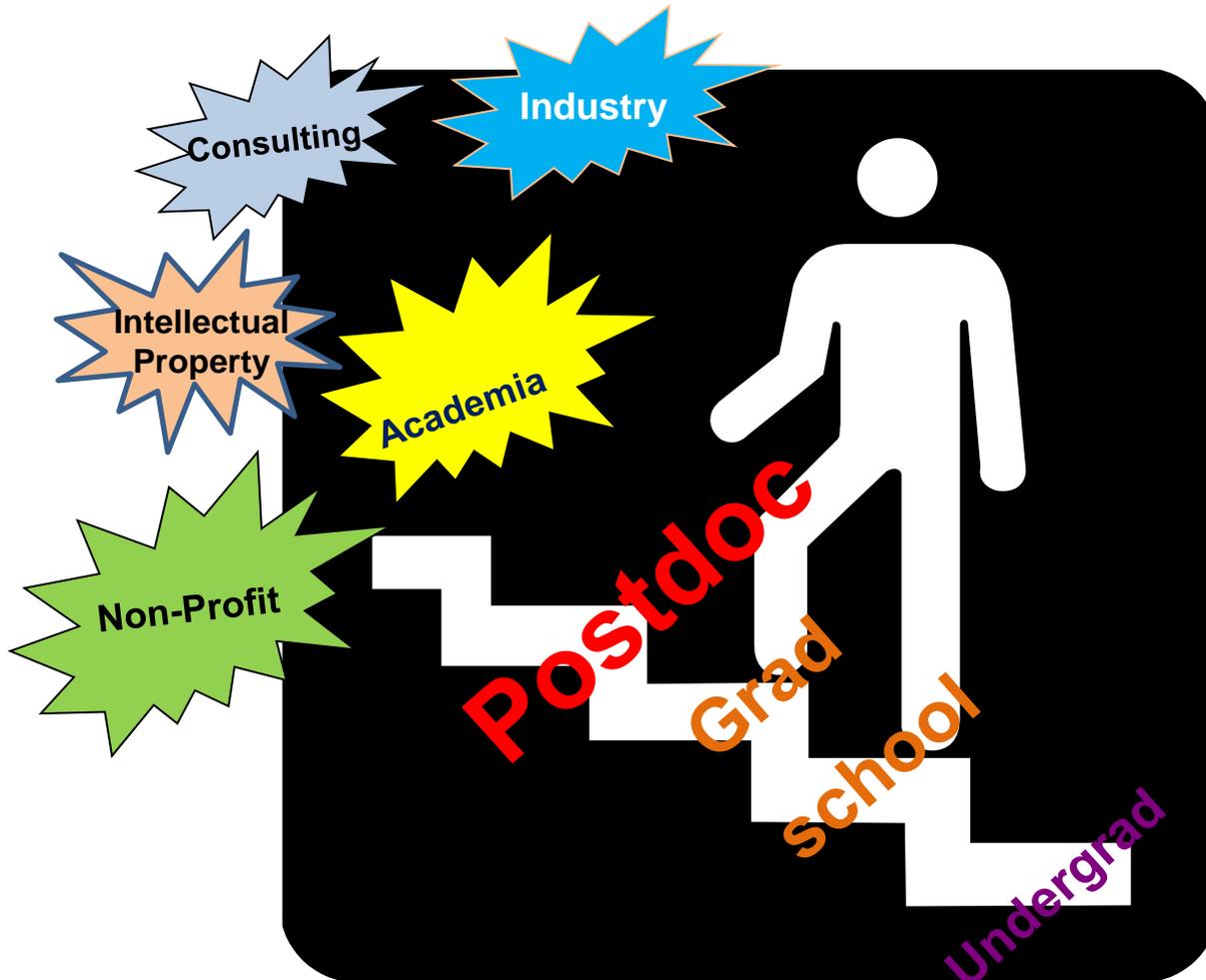
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# CHOOSING THE RIGHT POSTDOC POSITION



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## What is a postdoc?

- A postdoctoral trainee (“postdoc”) is an individual holding a doctoral degree ( or an M.D.) who is engaged in a temporary period of mentored research and/or scholarly training *for the purpose of acquiring the professional skills needed to pursue a career path of his or her choosing*
- **What is in a name?** Same work, different titles at different institutions



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## Why do a postdoc?

- Postdoctoral training is an important step towards an independent research career
- Some fields require it, and in some areas it is optional
- Now there are postdoc positions in fields which did not have the “culture” of postdoctoral training
  - ✓ such as anthropology, psychology
  - ✓ partly due to the evolution of interdisciplinary research



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## When do you start looking for a postdoc?

- Depends on the kind of postdoc
- Postdoc fellowships
  - ✓ NSF, NIH, National Labs, Foundations
  - ✓ Industry, Teaching or Science Policy
  - ✓ Influenced by deadlines
- Fellowships through universities and centers
- Postdoc with a faculty member
  - ✓ Grants, timing
- **Talk to your Ph.D. advisor and other faculty members on your committee**



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## Where can I look for postdoc positions?

- **Networking**
- Academic journals in your discipline, Nature, Science
- Job sites
  - ✓ <http://jobs.phds.org/>
  - ✓ [www.minoritypostdoc.org](http://www.minoritypostdoc.org)
  - ✓ sites of the universities where you wish to relocate
- Conferences and meetings
- Professional development organizations' websites



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## A typical postdoc application

- CV
- Include
  - ✓ publications
  - ✓ teaching experience
  - ✓ relevant skills
  - ✓ service
  - ✓ outreach
- Research statement
- References
  - ✓ who do you ask?



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## What makes a successful postdoc experience?

- Effective goal setting
- Communication with your PI
- Individual Development Plan – myIDP
  - ✓ <http://myidp.sciencecareers.org/>
- Other IDP resources available at the institution
  - ✓ annual review plan
- A mentoring circle
- Research and Publications
- Teaching Experience
  - ✓ attend workshops on teaching methods
  - ✓ teach a course or portions of a course during your postdoc
- Career development workshops



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## Questions to ask

- How long does the postdoc last?
  - ✓ Inquire about the grant duration
- IDP
- Grant, fellowship or teaching opportunities.
- Career development opportunities
  - ✓ CIC-PAI
  - ✓ BEST initiative
- Travel for conferences
- Postdoc appointment vs employment
- Role of Postdoc Offices, Associations or Societies
- Salary scale
- Benefits



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## Also consider

- Outreach/mentoring
- Committee Work
  - ✓ local or National Postdoc Association
- Work Life Balance
- Starting a family?
  - ✓ check out the HR policies of the institution
  - ✓ get on the list for child care centers



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## Before you decide on the offer think about

- The PI and his/her research publications
- Where are the postdoc alumni?
- Lab culture
- Institutional support
- Your career goals
  - ✓ how this position helps you in getting there



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## The corner stones for success depend on

- Future career goals
  - ✓ Academia
  - ✓ Industry
  - ✓ other options
  - ✓ what needs to be done to get there
- Identifying a good mentor
  - ✓ need not be your PI
  - ✓ a mentoring team
- PI-postdoc relationship

# Resources

## Articles and resources on life, opportunities, trials, tribulations as a postdoc

- [www.aaas.org](http://www.aaas.org)
- [www.nationalpostdoc.org](http://www.nationalpostdoc.org)

## Fellowships (further information can be found within the websites)

- <http://grants.gov/>
- [www.minoritypostdoc.org](http://www.minoritypostdoc.org)
- <http://www.aaas.org/program/science-technology-policy-fellowships>
- <http://www.nsf.gov/funding/>
- <http://grants.nih.gov/training/nrsa.htm>
- <http://www.cancer.org/Research/ResearchProgramsFunding/postdoctoral-fellowships>
- [http://my.americanheart.org/professional/Research/FundingOpportunities/Funding-Opportunities\\_UCM\\_316909\\_SubHomePage.jsp](http://my.americanheart.org/professional/Research/FundingOpportunities/Funding-Opportunities_UCM_316909_SubHomePage.jsp)
- <http://sites.nationalacademies.org/pga/fordfellowships/>
- **Marie Curie International Fellowships - <http://cordis.europa.eu/improving/fellowships/apply.htm>**
- **Humboldt- <http://www.humboldt-foundation.de/web/humboldt-fellowship-postdoc.html>**

## Institutional Fellowships

- <http://beckman.illinois.edu/research/fellows-and-awards/postdoctoral>
- <http://provostpostdoc.uchicago.edu/>
- <https://postdoc.duke.edu/duke-provosts-postdoctoral-program>

## Industry Postdocs

- <http://www.us.novartis.com/careers/postdoctoral-fellowships.shtml>
- <http://www.labratjobs.com/job/36067/post-doctoral-fellowship/>

## Teaching Postdocs

- <http://www.physiology.emory.edu/FIRST/index.htm>
- <http://spire.unc.edu/>

## Professional Development

- myIDP- <http://myidp.sciencecareers.org/>
- NIH website- [https://www.training.nih.gov/nih\\_resources](https://www.training.nih.gov/nih_resources)

## Work Life Balance

- <http://www.nationalpostdoc.org/publications/>
- <http://www.nationalpostdoc.org/publications/family-friendly/maternity-guide>



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## How did we do?

- Answer the survey!
  - ✓ Will be emailed to all participants
  - ✓ <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/sloanweb2015-2>

## Questions & Answers

**1. Question: Any possibility to have all the information for those people and places help us how to find postdoc?**

Postdoc positions are advertised or announced in different locations. There are a few places where you might find some of the positions (listed in the presentation) but usually it is not complete. Also, it is very dynamic. Identifying a postdoc position in the research area of your choice would involve

- looking at the professional society websites in your area
- talking to faculty members at your institution who are doing research in that area
- contacting faculty members who are publishing in that area
- networking at conferences or meetings

**2. Question: How many pages should your CV be? 2? 4? Unlimited?**

You want to be able to capture the attention of the reader and retain it. So if you can include the highlights of your academic background, relevant experiences, skills, publications in 2 – 3 pages, it would be good. There is no defined page limit.

**3. Question: Should you include a cover letter with your CV?**

A cover letter or a research statement with your CV would be good and it needs to be tailored to the position or to the faculty member's research group you are applying to. If you are contacting a faculty member by email you want the body of the email to be a synthesis of your CV and cover letter and attach those two documents to the email.

**4. Question: Is it useful to include the technical conferences you attended in your CV?**

It depends on how one categorizes the conference attended and depends on if it enhances the CV or makes no difference. Attending a technical conference can be included if it was to train in a specific technique that helped towards your skill sets.

**5. Question: What is the ideal number of publications a postdoc might be required or expected to have?**

Having a publication is a reflection of your productivity as a graduate student. Though there is no idea number, having a couple of publications would indicate the extent of success one has had. Sometimes graduate students get one first author publication after their graduation and may be one or two second author publications from other projects. The number and authorship level can be variable and faculty are aware of this.

**6. Question: I understand that publication is important, but how important is it to get a post doc?**

It is important but need not be detrimental. Sometimes faculty members are looking for a postdoc with a specific skill to fill the needs of the research project. And sometimes some research projects can be early investigations into a project or some projects do not lend them to results that can be published early and need other experiments to be validated. Exceptional situations can be addressed in the cover letter. Look into opportunities to co-author review articles as a graduate student can also contribute towards a publication list.

**7. Question: what the website where you can get a template for my IDP?**

The IDP website is <http://myidp.sciencecareers.org>

**8. Question: What about international postdoc opportunities?**

Some students may be interested in looking for international postdoc positions either through fellowships or because they want to work with a certain researcher who is well known in that area. Sometimes the choice could be due to geographical reasons. Working in a different continent, with different work culture and educational requirements can be used to one's advantage. These are great opportunities to expand one's network and gain expertise. However it would be good to maintain the connections gained through graduate studies in USA. Attending conferences in the US and networking, collaborating in projects can be ways to do so.

**9. Question: What is the relationship between teaching and post-doc research? Why is it important to have teaching experience beforehand and why seek teaching opportunities during if position is focused on research?**

If one is interested in a career in a tenure track faculty position in academia, then trying to get teaching opportunities during the Ph.D. process or during postdoc would be good. Sometimes teaching opportunities may not be a formal teaching of a course but supervising and mentoring undergraduate research projects also are valuable experiences.

**10. Question: Does selecting a non-traditional postdoc exclude you from returning to traditional research in the future?**

What does non-traditional mean? If it is something like science policy or communication, then maybe doing a supplementary fellowship or finding research experiences to complement would be a good. Research areas are changing, and moving more towards interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary kind.

**11. Question: Many postdoc listings I've seen have an extensive list of skill requirements. How is it possible to get into a postdoc which may be related, but not identical to your thesis research?**

If there is a specific area you are interested in that is outside of your Ph.D. then it would be good to start talking to a faculty member who works in that new area about your interest and find out what can be done to bridge the gap and how your current skill set can be transferred or be complementary to the new area. It may be that you would need a few additional course or workshops and or course adding extensive literature review can contribute to bridging that gap. Directly emailing the faculty who advertised about how strict those needs are also can help in getting a better picture before deciding not apply. What would be useful for the faculty member who advertised that position and to your referees is how this new area would tie in to your research goals.

**12. Question: Is there a recommended number of postdocs that we should do if we want a good teaching/research position?**

One postdoc is needed in current times for STEM disciplines. A well-planned, strategic decision in choosing that first postdoc, and making it work for you in terms of research productivity, professional development, having mentors is the ideal path.

Two is optional and if the two positions help you arrive at your required skill set, research and career goals, then yes doing two would make sense. But do keep track of number years passed since graduation. Doing more than two, or staying in any postdoc position for too long or can sometimes be detrimental.

**Suggested Additional Resources:**

The National Postdoctoral Association

[www.nationalpostdoc.org](http://www.nationalpostdoc.org)

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