PANEL DISCUSSION
How to find a job/postdoc position?

Panelists:
Dr. Carol Horvitz, Dr. Bill Browne, Dr. Isaac Skromne, Dr. Julia Dallman.

Opening statements
Julia: I was hired two years ago and I have hired a postdoc for my lab. The main goals for a doctor should be to obtain new skills and publish. It’s a trade off because it might be hard to do both at the same time. As for the environment, it’s important to seek out opportunities for new skills and be flexible if the top choice is not available. In some cases, people have significant others and this might be an issue about job possibilities. Also certain PIs may not be approachable. If the target isn’t necessary ready, start in advance. Publish in graduate school, acquire funding (looks good on CV), and talk to people about a wide variety of options.

Bill: Reiterates the announcement cartoon (see below). It’s too late to start looking after you have graduated. Define early what to do next. Planning and planning, have Plans A, B and C. Make them independent plans from each other. Plan A should be the most developed. Where do you want to send your proposal to, what agency? Planning gives you independence, hard targets, and dates for proposal preparation. Define your collaborators, initiate contact. Realistically you should start one or two years ahead of projected defense. Plan B: not necessarily look for funding; pursue a valid idea with the advisor you choose. Plan C: As a graduate student you are mentored closely, develop your ideas. As a postdoc you will have more independence. Think of the next step, developing a program. Think and plan ahead for a couple of contingencies.

Isaac: Start your job search yesterday. Your current position is the present, think of the future. What type of job do you want? It might not necessarily mean academia only. There are alternative positions. An example of where to look for is Sciencecareers.org. They are real careers not alternatives. How do you position yourself? Are people looking to hire only nationals? Your current job is a stepping stone. Prepare in additional, write grants, collaborations, independent funding, multitasking, manage people. What if they don’t hire now? Be an attractive candidate in the future. Isaac’s personal example: I wanted a developmental job and also in neurobiology, be attractive in both. Think of what to do now to be in a good position.

Carol: I agree with everything said earlier. People are going to be writing letters of recommendation for you. It’s an important feature in your file. What type of scientist are you? You want your recommendation letters to say: this person has made a major contribution. Make it easy for people to write your recommendation letters. Show you are productive (publish). Have good ideas and be organized to turn them into papers (scientific currency). Apply for every grant, they add up. It will be in your records. Publish early, when you hire a postdoc you only
have one or two years. Ideally you should have independent funding but you end up writing grants together. I had to be flexible early on; I was teaching part time and had a teaching postdoc. I then made research contacts and landed a postdoc position.

**Bill:** Bring your own funding. It’s the opportunity to get your own ideas out.

**Question session:**
**Rebecca:** Is it too early for me to start thinking about postdocs? (First year graduate student).
**Bill:** For now concentrate on your thesis design.
**Julia:** Get your feet wet, go to meetings, get hands on experience.
**Isaac:** it’s important to think what your trajectory will be.

**Adrienne:** Where should we be looking?
**Faculty:** State supported universities have good funding. Outside sources: National Postdoctoral Association, Societies of your specific field, training grants with postdoc funding, American Association of University Women, NatGeo, NSF, NIH. Some universities might have departmental postdocs, Smithsonian Institute. Do Google searches. The more prestigious the award, the shorter the application. Contact your potential mentor.
**Isaac:** my old advisor told people to look for grants to get out the bad people.

**Floria:** What about starting a postdoc using techniques you are not familiar with at all?
**Bill:** Developing a new set of techniques is more than normal; it’s not an automatic retractor because you need that experience. An indicator of somebody that is focused is that they see the need to get new ideas.
**Julia:** ideas are the motivators. You need to be a self starter

**Isaac:** the advisor wants good ideas from the postdoc, start thinking of a prospective postdoc

**Carol:** ideally you should be in a vibrant lab where everybody is training. Don’t be intimidated by tools

**Rebecca:** How do you step from fellowships to faculty positions?
**Isaac:** Publication records, independence. Get along with people, network. It’s ok to go to a postdoc where funding is already there. It’s incredibly important to go to meetings and talk to people. It’s hard but you should meet new people.
**Julia:** You can have great ideas but have trouble expressing them. Grant writing is very different from results.
**Isaac:** Look at applications, what is behind that document?

**Adrienne:** What about a teaching position?
**Carol:** Do you want a job with a Liberal Arts College? It depends with each institution
**Julia:** there is a huge diversity. Some schools balance research and teaching.
**Carol:** once you start teaching you don’t have that much time left. If you do a research postdoc you’ll have more options. It’s better to have choices of more options.
**Isaac:** you won’t be called for teaching if you don’t have the experience
**Carol:** apply for different positions
Julia: it changes from year to year
Isaac: who has a plan? A good idea is to have a 3 year plan.

Alternative jobs:
Julia: there are other job options, for example consulting with NOAA, educational software, companies, and industry. Confront with the trouble now to get skills you sought after.
Government jobs: USDA, policy, NGOs in conservation
Isaac: AAS brings doctors to Washington to bridge policy and health related issues. They need people that have more than one skill set. There are also science communicator jobs. Editorial houses, proofreading manuscripts, for example Harvard University Press.

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