The Postdoctoral Advisory Council (PAC) has had another productive semester, but we’re also facing some serious challenges.

The Office of Postdoctoral Studies (OPS) and the PAC host many events each year for UNL postdocs, advisors, and their families. We began Fall semester with Postdoc Appreciation Week (p. 2), devoted to recognizing contributions of postdocs to the University. During the Fall Research Fair a month later, we hosted the Outstanding Postdoc and Postdoc Mentor Award Luncheon, and invited Dr. Shirley Malcom of the AAAS to speak (p. 3). Coming up this semester we’ve scheduled Dr. Mark Doyle, Director of IANR Global Engagement, to conduct a workshop on communicating your research to a lay audience. The next issue will cover his workshop in detail, but in this issue we have included a Communicating Science feature article (p. 4) by Greetchen Diaz-Muñoz, a postdoc in the Nebraska Center for Virology.

We asked postdocs to send us their publications, external grants and awards for 2013, and we compiled a list beginning on page 5 of this issue. Keeping in mind that it represents only a small portion of the work that postdocs do at UNL, it is amazing what benefit we bring about.

As always, the PAC is grateful to Dr. Prem Paul, Vice Chancellor for Research & Economic Development, and Dr. Ellen Weissinger, Senior Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, for their continuing support of the UNL postdoc community.

In the last several months, many of our PAC colleagues have been promoted or have moved on to other career opportunities, so we need other postdocs to join us. We are working on several activities and initiatives (p. 9), and we recently added a new faculty advisor to the PAC, Dr. Greg Snow (Physics). We look forward to having his perspective and advice at our meetings.

I’ve found serving on the PAC an invaluable networking tool and a way to promote interaction among postdocs. Please attend our next meeting to see all the interesting things we do and how you can help. We meet in Seaton Hall at 4 p.m. on the 4th Thursday of each month.

— Christopher Chizinski
Postdoc Appreciation Week

The 5th Annual Postdoc Appreciation Reception was held September 19th, 2013. Hosted in the Van Brunt Visitor’s Center, postdocs and PIs from all disciplines came to relax and engage in conversation over drinks and hors d’oeuvres.

A short program was conducted by Chris Chizinski, Chair of the PAC, who welcomed those in attendance and introduced the members of the PAC. The Office of Postdoctoral Studies then recognized Dr. Concetta DiRusso for her contribution to the PAC and the wider postdoc community at UNL by presenting her with a memento of her service.

The 6th Annual Postdoc Appreciation Day is scheduled for Friday, September 19th, 2014. Save the date now and plan to join us for another great evening.
Dr. Shirley Malcom (AAAS) offered a workshop titled, “What Else Can You Do With A PhD?” during the 2013 UNL Fall Research Fair. At the Postdoc Luncheon we also recognized the winners of the 2013 Outstanding Postdoc and Outstanding Postdoc Mentor Awards. Congratulations to our winners:

- Postdoc Srinivas Kota (Psychology)
- Postdoc “Bala” Balasubramanian (Nebraska Center for Materials & Nanoscience)
- Professor Xiao Cheng Zeng (Chemistry)

Dr. Janet Kayfetz (UCSB) returned to campus in October to conduct a Research Presentations Workshop with the same high energy and extensive experience that she exhibited during the Research Writing Boot Camp last May.

Participants got individual attention on the fundamentals of giving an oral presentation, including posture, breathing, and body gestures, as well as tips on “telling your story” in an effective, persuasive way.

Dr. Kayfetz’s teaching schedule will prevent her from visiting UNL in 2014, but she’s still offering real-time, online writing consultations at a cost of $100 per hour. Email her at janetkayfetz@gmail.com for more details.
Communicating Your Research

Excerpted from an article by Greetchen Diaz-Muñoz, an NIH Postdoctoral Fellow at the Nebraska Center for Virology and a volunteer member of the administrative team of “Ciencia Puerto Rico” (www.cienciapr.org), a nonprofit organization that promotes science and science education.

Why is it important to communicate science to the general public?
Many people have no proper idea of what science is and the essential work done by scientists. It’s important for members of society to distinguish between true science and pseudoscience. Knowledge empowers the community, it gives people the freedom to choose the causes that truly deserve to be supported, and gives each individual tools for critical thinking and reasoning to make decisions for their life. Who is better to share this information than a postdoc—a young, energetic person with up-to-date scientific knowledge and first-hand experience in research?

You’re probably already a good communicator when it comes to a scientific audience, but imagine you’re visiting your home or you’re having a great time out with some friends—how do you explain the importance of your scientific research? If you find it difficult to explain complicated concepts to these people with little experience or training in the area, it will be just as difficult to explain scientific ideas to students or members of the general public.

I’ve learned that to attract the interest of a broad audience, you have to explain concepts in a simple way and be creative. Using scientifically correct but simple vocabulary has helped me to condense my thoughts on complicated issues and seek new ways to carry an appealing message that people remember. I need to discern the truly important details and focus on describing the concepts that best explain it. To tell stories about science and scientists to a public audience you must be sensitive to the audience’s level of understanding. The development of this skill is certainly very useful for communication regardless of who you’re communicating with.

During my participation in a science teaching fellowship program of the American Society for Microbiology, I learned that to create a good curriculum I should: (1) identify the outcomes and goals that I want to achieve, (2) deliberately choose effective educational methods, and (3) design methods of assessment to measure the learning acquired by students. In communication with a lay audience there may be no chance for assessment, but I still stop to consider, “What is my goal? What is the message I want my audience to keep? What is the best way to explain myself? What resources or strategies will be best for my explanation?”

Communicating science to the general public gives you the opportunity to acquire professional skills that will serve you in your future, and gives the opportunity to participate in the exchange of ideas between science and society. Take advantage of your opportunity to be a science communicator!

More Resources for Science Communication:
Center for Public Engagement with Science and Technology (AAAS CPE)
Mass Media Science and Engineering Fellows Program (AAAS Mass Media Fellows)
Professional Development Workshop (UNL Postdoc Events)
On March 19, 2014, OPS and the PAC are hosting Dr. Mark Doyle, Director of IANR Global Engagement at UNL, for a professional development workshop titled Communicating Your Research to a Lay Audience. Attend this workshop to learn some effective communication techniques, practice describing your research to a non-expert, and gain a number of useful resources.
Postdoc Accomplishments — 2013

Postdoc authors are indicated in bold.


Irmak S, Odhiambo LO, Specht JE, and Djaman K. Hourly and daily single and basal evapotranspiration crop coefficients as a function of growing degree days, days after emergence, leaf area index, fraction green canopy cover and plant phenology for soybean. Transactions of the ASABE. 2013; 56(5): 1785–1803.


GRANTS AND AWARDS

Massilamany C, Myocarditis foundation travel grant, 2013. The Myocarditis Foundation grant recipient workshop in conjunction with the Heart Failure Society of America’s Annual Scientific Meeting, Sep. 21–22, Orlando, FL.

Massilamany C, Postdoctoral Research Fellowship Grant from the Myocarditis Foundation “Delineating the role of cardiac myosin-specific CD8 T cells in autoimmune myocarditis.”

Hammerl E, Layman Award ($9500) “Investigation of the deciduous teeth in chimpanzees and the other great apes: implications for life history evolution.”

Vu H, ($75,000) “Rational design of a broadly protective vaccine against porcine reproductive and respiratory syndrome virus.”
Postdoc Travel Grant

Since 2011 the PAC and OPS have offered a travel grant program to help send postdocs to professional and academic conferences to present their research. The program has provided assistance to twenty postdocs from ten different UNL departments. Grants are made possible by financial backing from the UNL Office of Research and Economic Development and from donations to the Post-Doctoral Faculty Travel Fund established at the University of Nebraska Foundation.

Donations to the Grant fund can be made at the Foundation’s website: nufoundation.org.

Design Contest Announcement

To raise funds for the postdoc travel awards, the Postdoctoral Advisory Council (PAC) Fundraising Committee is planning to sell T-shirts with an attractive and clever design representing the postdoc community at UNL. The goal is to have shirts ready for sale at our Annual Spring Picnic on Saturday, May 17, 2014.

To meet our springtime goal, we invite you to submit original T-shirt designs before April 18, 2014. The winning design will win a prize of $50 and a free shirt. Be creative and show your postdoc pride!

Contest Rules:
- Only UNL postdocs, faculty, staff or students are eligible to win.
- Designs must be original, unpublished work, and must not include any third-party logos or copyrighted material.
- The design may include line art and text, but not photographs.
- Design is for the back of the T-shirt, up to an area of 10” x 10”
- One- or two-color designs are preferred to keep production costs low.
- Winner must agree to assign rights to the design to the Office of Postdoctoral Studies.

Submitting Designs:
- T-shirt designs should be submitted in .eps, .ai, .pdf, or .svg format.
- Send design files to postdoc@unl.edu before April 18, 2014.