ANNUAL REPORT
Office of Postdoctoral Affairs
2014 - 2015
KU MEDICAL CENTER
The University of Kansas
The University of Kansas Medical Center  
Office of Postdoctoral Affairs

2014-2015 marked the start of a new level of support and service from the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs (OPA). The office was started in 2007 by Allen Rawitch, PhD—Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Dean of Graduate Studies. This commitment to scholarship and enthusiastic support for postdoctoral scholars was echoed again, when Robert Klein, PhD became Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Dean of Graduate Studies.

During this past year, with new resources for increased programs and services, the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs launched a revamped National Postdoctoral Appreciation Week celebration, provided a series of monthly and special programming, conducted a postdoctoral survey, represented the University at the National Postdoctoral Association annual meeting, and awarded professional development funds to postdoctoral scholars. In addition, the Postdoctoral Advisory Committee was convened and began tackling issues including salaries, position descriptions, and policies for professional development of scholars.

While these achievements are part of renewed leadership and institutional support, at the heart of each accomplishment are the postdoctoral scholars and faculty mentors who have led the way and strengthened research and education at The University of Kansas Medical Center.

The Office of Postdoctoral Affairs


- The 2014 National Postdoctoral Appreciation Week saw over 60 postdocs, mentors, and support staff attend a luncheon, career development session, and KPA social gathering.

- Monthly and special programming series covered topics ranging from Social Styles, networking, writing for publication, careers outside academia, and teaching in higher education.

- Over 100 scholars participated in programming offered by the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs, with many attending multiple events.

- Seven scholars received professional development awards to support their travel and participation in career enriching activities.

- Postdoctoral leaders and OPA staff attended the National Postdoctoral Association annual meeting in Baltimore.

- The Postdoc Press quarterly newsletter was revived, with four new issues presented.

- An annual Postdoctoral Survey was initiated, with strong response rates.
2014-2015 Office of Postdoctoral Affairs Programs

During the 2014-2015 year, the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs established a monthly programming series. In addition to providing valuable training and development opportunities, this series was an important part of the ongoing improvements in postdoctoral scholarship at the University, establishing consistency and accountability from OPA for scholars and mentors alike.

A series of career and professional development sessions provided scholars the opportunity to learn new skills and prepare for the next steps in their careers. Topics covered included Social Styles from the Jayhawk Way leadership series, communication skills for difficult conversations, professional networking, developing and using CVs and resumes, and personal branding.

In addition to these sessions, the monthly programming series includes career panels which provide an opportunity for scholars to hear from professionals in a variety of careers. In December, scholars attended a panel focused on academic research career paths featuring faculty from KUMC. In March, a Beyond the Bench panel featured professionals from industry, publishing, intellectual property, and nonprofit sectors. June brought a panel focused on teaching careers, ranging from K-12 education, through community college and liberal arts opportunities, to larger research oriented institutions. In addition, a panel planning committee was formed, bringing together postdoctoral leaders from the KUMC Postdoc Association and graduate student leaders from the Biomedical Research Resource Association. Together, these individuals will develop future panel sessions, providing an opportunity to network with professionals who serve as guest panelists.

Beyond the monthly series, special programs were also featured. In March, through partnership with the Student Research Forum, scholars had the opportunity to engage in a candid discussion with Nobel Laureate Martin Chalfie. In April, guest speaker Paul Casella held workshops on speaking and writing for scholars, and in the winter, a series of Writing Workshops were offered.
In September of 2014, KUMC joined with the National Postdoctoral Association and institutions across the country in the biggest celebration of postdoctoral scholarship yet. Over 50 scholars, mentors, and administrators attended an appreciation luncheon to kick off a full week of activities. The lunch featured an appearance by campus favorite Baby Jay as well as door prizes donated by faculty, staff, and departments on campus.

The week continued with a special career development session focused on social media and professional networking. In addition to learning about tools such as LinkedIn and ResearchGate, scholars enjoyed an ice cream social and had the opportunity to have a professional headshot taken by KUMC’s Photo Services department for use on their social media profiles. The week wrapped up with a social gathering in Westport with the KUMC Postdoctoral Association. Scholars enjoyed treats and a historical tour of the neighborhood by a staff volunteer.

September also featured the start of an annual survey of postdoctoral scholars at KUMC. The Office of Postdoctoral Affairs with the Postdoctoral Advisory Committee developed a survey to better understand the current climate for postdoctoral scholarship at the University, as well as to help identify priority issues.

The survey was distributed electronically, with 109 scholars invited to participate and 57 responding. The survey looked at the background of scholars as well as their interests and professional goals. From the responses, program strengths were identified – with a vast majority reporting that their postdoctoral position at KUMC is successfully providing them the research training and opportunities they needed. Survey responses also helped identified opportunities for improvements and allowed OPA and the Advisory Committee to prioritize these items, including postdoctoral salaries, professional development training needs, and a desire for services such as career counseling.

Survey responses overwhelmingly reported positive relationships with faculty mentors as well as appreciation for the newly launched efforts of the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs and the survey.
In May of 2015, the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs continued its partnership with the Office of Graduate Medical Education and the Office of the Vice Chancellor of Research to present the sixth annual Resident, Postdoc, and Fellow Research Forum. The forum began with an opening keynote from KUMC faculty member Lisa Stehno-Bittle, PT, PhD. Over 25 postdoctoral scholars presented oral and poster presentations over the course of two days. In addition to postdoc participation, several postdoctoral faculty mentors served as volunteer judges for the event. The forum concluded with a lunch featuring a keynote presentation from guest speaker John Spertus, MD and an award ceremony.

The University of Kansas Medical Center is a sustaining member of the National Postdoctoral Association (NPA) – the largest national, nonprofit organization providing advocacy, support and resources for postdoctoral scholars in the country. Each year, the NPA holds their annual meeting, bringing postdoctoral scholars and administrators together to learn and network. In March, Ashley Carlson, Assistant Director for Postdoctoral Affairs, along with Heather Wilkins and Pavla Brachova, both postdoctoral scholars and leaders of the KUMC Postdoctoral Association, traveled to Baltimore, MD for the meeting. OPA was pleased to be able to financially support the attendance of all three attendees. In addition to valuable networking opportunities, workshops covered topics ranging from HR best practices, to advocacy skills and resources, and supporting diversity and mentoring on campus.
Four new issues of the quarterly Postdoc Press newsletter have been presented over the past year. The newsletter has featured topics ranging from useful information, to career development topics, to reports on employment trends for PhD scholars. Several postdoctoral scholars, as well as faculty, staff, and leadership have contributed to the growing success of the newsletter, which is gaining attention beyond the postdoctoral community on campus.

The newsletter includes a popular events calendar which includes OPA events as well as programs from other University groups of interest to postdoctoral scholars. The Office of International Programs has established a regularly occurring feature, with topics of interest to both international and domestic scholars.

This spring, the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs was able to make funds available for postdoctoral scholars, to support their individual professional development activities. Seven applicants were selected to receive $500 to support activities that enhanced their careers and professional goals. Gada Al-Ani, scholar in Cancer Biology; Pavla Brachova, scholar in Physiology; Hemant Chavan, scholar in Pharmacology, Toxicology, and Therapeutics; Shishen Du, scholar in Microbiology, Molecular Genetics and Immunology; Michelle Gates, scholar in Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences; Faezeh Koohestani, scholar in Molecular and Integrative Physiology; and Heather Wilkins, scholar in Neurology all received $500 each to support their travel to professional conferences.

In return for the financial support, each scholar will share their experiences and lessons learned with the KUMC postdoctoral community through activities such as articles in the newsletter, speaking at the KPA coffee hour, and leading workshops on campus.
Postdoctoral Advisory Committee

The Postdoctoral Advisory Committee originally convened with faculty, postdoc, and staff representatives to provide advice and support to the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs. The group has grown to include additional members from faculty and postdocs, as well as representatives from Human Resources, International Programs, and the Office of Research.

Informed by the 2014 Postdoctoral Survey, as well as committee input, a list of priority topics was created to help direct the committee’s work:

1. Salary Standards
2. Term Limits
3. Position Descriptions
4. Offer Letters
5. Individual Development Plans
6. Career Development
7. Policies for Fellowships and Extramural Funding
8. ADA Support and Compliance

Through enthusiastic effort and hard work, the committee has accomplished much on their first three priorities and is preparing to enter the next phase of action as work continues in the coming year.

KUMC Postdoctoral Association

The KUMC Postdoctoral Association established and held annual elections in December. Heather Wilkins, Pavla Brachova, Hemant Chavan, and Rebecca Burkhalter were elected as President, Vice President, Communications and Outreach Officer, and WIMS representative, respectively.

KPA spent much of the fall reviewing and updating by-laws, to reflect their new role on campus and their collaboration with the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs and the Postdoctoral Advisory Committee. The association also collaborates regionally with the Midwest Postdoctoral Forum. KPA also established a regular, monthly coffee hour. Over the course of eight meetings this year, presenters have included postdoctoral scholars presenting research data, representatives from sponsored program administration speaking on grant opportunities, and guest speakers presenting on career decisions, establishing a new lab, and selecting a mentor.

Above: Leaders of the KUMC Postdoctoral Association: Hemant Chavan, Heather Wilkins, Pavla Brachova, and Rebecca Burkhalter.

Above: Postdocs discuss topics at a professional development session.

Above: Postdocs network and hear speakers at the KPA monthly career development meetings.
Celebrating Success

Parking – This winter, the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs worked with the Vice Chancellor for Support Services to establish new parking options for postdoctoral scholars. After learning that several scholars needed an option for parking on campus after regular business hours, OPA was able to clarify parking policies with administration as well as extend the option for night and weekend parking passes at student rates for postdoctoral scholars.

Staff Tuition Waiver – This spring, OPA learned of confusion surrounding the Staff Tuition and Fee Waiver and its availability to postdoctoral scholars looking to take academic courses at KUMC. Through discussions with Student Services, Human Resources, and other campus leadership, it was determined that postdoctoral scholars who are employees of the University are eligible to apply for the Staff Tuition and Fee Waiver, which waives required campus fees as well as the difference of in-state and out-of-state tuition rates.

Dykes Library – After speaking to campus administrators during Postdoctoral Appreciation Week, the leadership at Dykes Library reached out to OPA to learn how to best serve postdoctoral scholars. A focus group was convened in which scholars provided input and asked questions. The library later contributed a comprehensive article to the newsletter and now regularly communicates training and service opportunities to the postdoctoral community.

OPA Lending Library – This summer, the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs was able to begin a lending library of professional development books for postdoctoral scholars. Book topics include creating CVs, grant writing, alternative careers for PhDs, and networking. The books are available to borrow in the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs.

For more information on the information in this report, or programs and services offered by the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs, please contact PostdoctoralOffice@kumc.edu or 913-588-2369.

Thank you!
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