Training PhD Mentors on Career & Professional Development (CPD)

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Training Landscape

• Workforce is changing – availability of faculty jobs diminishing
• Broader skills were always needed (even for faculty jobs!) but are now openly being sought after by employers and students
• Competency-based training provides a framework for students and postdocs to talk about skill development and career preparation
• Funding models at BU vary, and can limit students’ or postdocs’ ability to prioritize the professional development and internships that would help them broaden their skill set
What do national trends tell us about biomedical PhD Careers?

- Only 25% of PhD scientists will enter a tenure or tenure-track position\(^1-3\)
  - \# of PhD graduates in US has grown \(\sim 4X\) over the last 50 years\(^1-3\)
  - Growth in employment has occurred almost entirely in industrial sectors\(^2-5\)
  - Graduates are preferentially choosing careers beyond academia\(^6\)

17 Universities Receive R01-like Grant for Broadening Experiences in Scientific Training (BEST) from NIH Common Fund

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Postdoctoral Experiences Survey

• Sent to all postdocs annually
• Six sections of the survey: resource use / evaluation; plans for postdoc & career aspirations; experiences at BU; mentoring relationships; sense of belonging and community; demographics
• n = 397 unique responses over four annual surveys (avg 39% response rate)
• 38% of survey respondents from Medical Campus
• Goals – 1) develop programs, resources, and policies to better support postdocs; 2) evaluate office

Postdoc Orientation Survey

• Sent to new postdocs that register for new postdoc orientation
• Since moving to virtual orientations during COVID-19, 90% of postdocs attend orientation and take survey
• Themes cover career aspirations for postdoc, professional development interests, and the opportunity to submit questions
The need:

Trainees change their minds! 64% of trainees no longer are interested in their first career choice. They need career & professional development.

Only 20% of students would nominate their PI/Mentor for an award for excellence in career-professional.

Career planning and aspirations

- 89% of orientation survey respondents rank faculty careers as their first choice.
- On average, 21% ranked faculty careers as their first choice in the annual survey.
- 65% of postdocs do not have an IDP, only 20% discuss with research supervisor / PI.
What does your PI / Mentor do for career-professional development that has been MOST meaningful for you?

Key outcomes related to mentoring

- Half of postdocs reported satisfaction in their mentoring relationships with their primary PI / supervisor
- "If you could recommend one action or behavior..."
  - Open minded about non-academic careers
  - Career planning (e.g. talk about IDP)
  - Support postdocs’ developing autonomy / independence
  - Spending more time together
  - Increased casual interactions / informal conversations
  - Mindful of postdoc needs as much as their own
Low-Hanging Fruit to Improve Career & Prof Mentoring

- Initiate conversation with trainees about their career and professional development
- Offer dedicated time, space, and opportunity for trainees to explore careers

Breakout group conversation

Prompt: You have been invited to share the results of the Postdoctoral Experiences Survey at Research and Scholarly Activities Committee.

Based on the data, you want to persuade them to create a policy that would require postdocs and mentors to jointly complete an annual career plan / expectations template, submitted to PDPA.

1) How would you frame the problem?
2) What data would you describe?
3) What questions would you want them to reflect on?
References