

## **Introduction to Science Policy and Science Policy Panel discussion**

### **Summary by Scott Connelly, Ph.D. student**

In addition to robust research-specific training, Boston University (BU) Ph.D. students and post-doctoral fellows are encouraged to develop a panoply of translational skills including communication, management, critical thinking, and problem-solving. This diverse skillset empowers trainees to excel in positions within a variety of industries, including research and non-research environments. While some students and post-doctoral fellows enter their doctoral programs or fellowships confident in their future career paths, many continue to explore a variety of career options. Hosted by BU's Broadening Experiences in Scientific Training (BEST), this panel, held on March 15, 2023, was the first of a four-part series which invited current BU graduate students and post-doctoral fellows to explore major industries hiring biomedical Ph.D. graduates.

This Zoom session commenced with an introduction to science policy delivered by Ms. Jennifer Grodsky, Vice President for Federal Relations at BU. Ms. Grodsky started by defining science policy broadly as the set of federal rules and regulations that governs the conduct of science. She then described currently relevant science policy questions, including the distribution of research funding, the threat of foreign interference, and the regulations underpinning biosafety. Lastly, Ms. Grodsky recommended that students who seek involvement in science policy should explore resources, lectures, and fellowships offered by the National Science Policy Network (NSPN), the Engaging Scientists & Engineers in Policy Coalition (ESEP), and the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS).

The session then transitioned to a panel discussion which included an impressive group of scientists working in different science policy roles. Dr. Libby O'Hare, Senior Principal at Lewis-Burke Associates; Dr. Josh Shiode, Chief of Staff within the Office of Science in the Department of Energy; Dr. Naomi Webber, Senior Principal at Lewis-Burke Associates; and Dr. Carrie Wolinetz, Senior Advisor to the National Institutes of Health Director. Dr. Barbara Schreiber, Associate Professor of Biochemistry at Chobanian & Avedisian School of Medicine, moderated the discussion.

The panelists were asked to suggest recommendations for trainees interested in pursuing a career in science policy. Dr. Webber suggested developing an aptitude for delivering complex information in a concise form because it is a skill vital throughout all science policy positions. Furthermore, O'Hare stressed the importance of understanding the landscape of career opportunities available to a life science Ph.D. and she advocates for embracing new experiences within one's career. Moreover, Dr. Wolinetz advises new trainees to be bold in positions for which they apply and to become comfortable taking calculated risks in their career development. Dr. Wolinetz also reinforced the salience of networking early in one's training and reminded the audience that a Ph.D. program can enable development of communication and writing skills that can easily translate to careers outside of the lab. Importantly, the panelists advised the trainees to be true to themselves, to think about what they enjoy, and consider taking risks in navigating career options.

Next, the panelists were asked what they value in a new hire. Dr. O'Hare, who leads her firm's recruitment efforts, elaborated on the qualities of a desirable applicant including a clear prowess in teamwork, an attention to detail, a professional presence, strong communication skills, a willingness to take initiative, and an ability to work under a range of managerial styles. Dr. Shiode added that deep subject matter knowledge is not crucial for success in landing a science policy role because it is easily

acquired through on-the-job training. He stressed that the mastery of the soft skills described by Dr. O'Hare is more desired by hiring teams for positions in this field. Dr. Wolinetz shared that one can easily apply for government positions in science policy at [usajobs.gov](https://usajobs.gov). When doing so, she recommended using keywords from the job ad in the application and restraining humility when describing your skills and relevant experiences.

Lastly, the panelists were asked how they manage their work-life balance. Dr. O'Hare and Dr. Webber, both employees for Lewis-Burke Associates, shared that their roles afford them flexible hours and permit the separation of their work and homelives. Dr. O'Hare added the importance of setting boundaries with your employer to establish the work-life balance you desire. In contrast, Dr. Wolinetz and Dr. Shiode admitted they are currently in highly demanding roles that require long and unpredictable hours. Ms. Grodsky also says that her time at work can be fairly demanding. However, all maintain they were honored to be selected for their positions and find the work to be fulfilling and to represent important milestones in their careers.

It was an honor to have these impressive scientists join us for our career panel discussion. BU's BEST and all the attendees would like to thank the panel for helping to advance the careers of young scientists at BU. If you found this panel summary interesting, we invite you to check out the other three panel summaries from 2023, and to keep a lookout for future panels and other opportunities hosted by BU's BEST.