Historically, UC postdocs in the humanities and social sciences (HSS) have been a rather neglected group. In part this is because they are relatively small in numbers, compared to postdocs in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM). HSS postdocs also tend to work alone, which means they do not have the structure provided by a lab community to facilitate their presence as a group on campus. And yet UC HSS postdocs are a vibrant community of knowledge-makers. Their research and teaching is invaluable in promoting critical interpretations of human life in its social, political, cultural, psychological, and philosophical spheres. As reported elsewhere in this issue of the Postdoc Newsletter, the National Postdoctoral Association is finally taking an active role in recognizing and attracting postdocs in the humanities and social sciences.

Because they are a relatively new constituency on the organizational radar, HSS postdocs face some specific challenges. At the same time, the nature of the work they do opens up all kinds of interesting possibilities for them within the UC system, allowing many international postdocs the opportunity to explore life in the U.S. in ways that develop them academically, professionally, and personally.

Selena Daly is a postdoc in the Department of French and Italian at UC Santa Barbara (UCSB). She earned her PhD in Ireland, and completed a postdoc in Dublin before she took up her current position, funded by a Fulbright fellowship, as well as by an ELEVATE Irish Research Council Fellowship, co-funded by the European Union Marie-Curie Actions. She is at UCSB to finish a book on the history of Italian Futurism during World War I. Selena has been in Santa Barbara since October 2014, and finds it “pretty wonderful.” She loves that the beach is alluringly close to the campus, and that a stimulating academic environment matches the beauty of the geographical location.

Selena’s experience getting to UCSB demonstrates the importance for HSS postdocs of being proactive about exploring their new communities. Before she applied for funding to come to the U.S., Selena did a tremendous amount of research and networking. She had been in touch with the Department of English, the Department of French and Italian Studies, and the Center for Spatial Studies, Selena Daly

When you think of the word “postdoc,” what is the first image that pops into your head? Is it of a slovenly person hunched over a bench, pipette in hand, working with monkey brain? Or is it of a person wearing a shirt that says “Bazinga,” writing complicated equations, making scientific breakthroughs and looking so-very-cool in the process? While these images capture most of the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) postdocs out there, there are a small but significant number of postdocs who work in the Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS), and make significant contributions to the way we view society, history, art and life.

The concept of postdoctoral fellowships in the HSS is relatively recent. It began as a way to provide an extended training period for recent graduates, offering them a higher pay than their graduate student grant, more “real world” experience and providing them with the time they needed to do some research and turn their dissertations into books. On the flip side, the universities were able to get fresh talent at low cost. It was designed as a win-win situation for all. The Mellon Foundation was a driving force behind establishing these positions. In the early to mid-1990s, the Foundation started the John E Sawyer seminars among others as a means for new graduates to support their research ventures. These initial postdoctoral fellowships were short-
UC Riverside is smaller than the big UC campuses such as Berkeley and UCLA, but it boasts a committed and energetic Graduate Division, which looks after its postdocs. For over thirty years, Linda Scott has been a central part of the Graduate Division at UC Riverside. Scott has always demonstrated the ability to provide outstanding administrative support to graduate students and postdocs. In addition, in her mentoring and advisory role to the current Dean of the Graduate Division, Joseph Childers, she has shown exemplary commitment to the wellbeing of grad students and postdocs, as well as a deep understanding of their needs. Scott has recently retired, and her history at Riverside is emblematic of the extent to which the Graduate Division seeks to facilitate the well-being of its postdocs.

Dean Childers has known Scott for over twenty years, ever since he first sat on the Graduate Council as a new faculty member of the English Department. Already at that time, Scott was a senior staff member who provided the Council with important data and information on Graduate Division policy. When Childers became Associate Dean, his relationship with Scott deepened; she trained him on all aspects of Division and Council policy, and on the appropriate ways to respond to various difficulties graduate students were facing. Childers relates that one of the things he most admires about Scott is that she has “always been a real source of honest advice.” Scott never “gilds the lily” and tells “the Dean not what he wants to hear, but what he needs to hear.” She has no problem disagreeing with a decision made by the Dean, and always makes sure to spell out the implications of a decision she makes.

Linda Scott

The Postdoc Newsletter formally welcomes a new member of the family at another of the smaller UC campuses, UC Irvine. Celina Mojica became Director of Postdoctoral Affairs at the Graduate Division there a year ago.

Mojica herself is a former postdoc. This experience has enabled her to take on the role of Director with a perspective from the research side of the postdoc experience. She enjoys her new administrative post as it allows her to translate her experience into administrative practices for the benefit of postdocs. It can be challenging, though, Mojica says, to fill the gap between postdocs’ needs and administrative limitations. She sees her job as essentially “being there to bridge that gap.” For example, she helps the Postdoctoral Association with their workshops, connects postdocs to various resources on campus, helps them with matters ranging from appointment to personnel issues, and coordinates with the GPS-BIOMED program, a trainee program in the biomedical sciences funded by the National Institutes of Health.

What services and resources are currently on offer for postdocs at Irvine? Mojica highlights the importance of the Postdoctoral Association. The new Postdoctoral Association has worked really hard, she says, in developing events such as the career-exploration coffee hour, where postdocs are invited to explore non-academic careers by chatting with non-academic professionals. Robert Lin, President of the UCI Postdoctoral Association, adds that the Association also takes pride in its grant writing workshop, which has been very popular. “During this workshop series postdocs are invited to explore non-academic careers and are given some of the common mistakes that first time grant writers make,” Lin explains.

Apart from these initiatives, Irvine is in the process of setting up a relationship with California State University, Long Beach, with the aim of creating lectureship-type opportunities that would allow postdocs to gain some teaching experience. The lack of pedagogical training and experience is a problem faced by postdocs at many of the UC campuses, and it is wonderful to see UC Irvine taking this bull by the horns. It seems there are many advantages to having a former postdoc in the role of Director of Postdoctoral Affairs.
Did you know...

that women are hired at a higher rate than men into academic positions in STEM fields? At least, this is true according to a recent, large scale experiment conducted by Cornell psychology researchers (April 28, 2015, “National hiring experiments reveal 2:1 faculty preference for women on STEM tenure track” PNAS). Identical, very high achieving, CVs were submitted in application to academic jobs under male and female names. The preference for hiring women held true whether applications were reviewed by women or men. Many have responded negatively to this report, accusing the authors of having biased the results; many others have come forth with similar data, and other studies showing similar results have been published. Beryl Lieff Benderly (April 29, 2015, “Women have a hiring advantage in the scientific stratosphere” Science Careers) notes that even at a 2:1 ratio, hiring rates into tenure track jobs are still abysmally low (2-4%), and that this pattern does not negate that gender bias has been occurring earlier in the careers of women, or after hiring. Further, this pattern only holds for the group tested, namely, high achieving candidates.

A New York Times editorial by the same authors of the PNAS study, (Wendy Williams and Stephen Ceci, “Academic Science Isn’t Sexy” October 31, 2014, The New York Times) describes the same authors’ paper in another journal summarizing evidence for sexism at many levels in academia in the STEM fields. The summary: there is little evidence for gender bias in not only hiring, but salary, promotion, productivity, and job satisfaction. Yet the numbers don’t lie; there are many fewer tenured women in these disciplines than there are men. The authors discuss possible reasons for this disparity, listing such events as choices that girls make about taking math classes early on. These ideas are evaluated further by Rachel Bernstein (November 06, 2014, “Is academic science sexist?” Science Careers) who notes many other researchers in the same field that do not believe the data. She summarizes arguments for why the explanations offered by Williams and Ceci are, themselves, sexist. It seems that, while it is an improvement that women who achieve at a certain (high) level may not face levels of discrimination previously common, reaching that point is likely still fraught with obstacles. All agree that the evidence for more equity in hiring and other milestones is alive and possessing strength, but there are many more challenges, and from which you will learn to be better researchers. The authors encourage discussing them with others, peers, supervisors, counselors, and trying to better your situation so that you can be successful. Addressing these challenges will lead to better science and a better outcome.

Women are expected to be something other than mousy and passive, but any sign of strength is considered “abrasive.”

Some advise postdoctoral researchers to stay vigilant during the inevitable moments of difficulty or failure in their research. In their article (February 4, 2015, “‘Good’ Hard vs. ‘Bad’ Hard, Which type of research challenges are you experiencing?” The Chronicle of Higher Education), Clio Andris and Lily A. Chylek lay out two lists of challenges. One lists what they call “good-hard challenges,” those arising from too much to do, experimental problem solving, weak skill sets, and the like. These are all challenges that can be overcome with hard work, and from which you will learn to be better researchers. The other list contains bad-hard challenges and includes a longer list of difficulties ranging from not being treated well or fairly, not being heard or taken seriously, being exploited, and lacking interest or motivation. These challenges speak to a larger problem or set of problems and the authors encourage discussing them with others, peers, supervisors, counselors, and trying to better your situation so that you can be successful. Addressing these challenges will lead to better science and a better outcome.
Prior to 2005, in order to be eligible for health insurance benefits, postdocs in the UC system needed to be employed at 43.5%. Once this threshold was met, a postdoc’s health insurance further depended on his or her source of funding: postdocs employed under a faculty member’s grant received full faculty or staff benefits, while paid-direct postdocs, that is, postdocs funded by an individual stipend or training grant, were entitled with funds to cover their health care, but not for any campus-sponsored plans. Moreover, the paid-directs with pre-existing conditions were, pre-Affordable Care Act, routinely denied benefits under an individual plan.

Postdocs, in other words, were not covered under a comprehensive group plan. That begun to change in 1998, when Garnett-Powers and Associates (GPA) approached and convinced Health Net to insure postdocs at UC Irvine under a group contract. In partnership with Health Net, GPA then developed a billing system that allowed each department to pay for their postdocs’ benefits directly to GPA. The system proved effective, and soon UCLA and UC Berkeley began offering health insurance plans to their postdocs via GPA.

These developments eventually caught the eye of UC as a whole. Since 1995 UC had been seeking to establish a comprehensive group plan for all postdocs, regardless of source of funding. UC set up a system-wide committee to pursue this goal by deciding on what types of medical, dental, vision, life and disability insurance should be considered, and on the distribution of contributions between a postdoc’s wages/stipend and the campus. After a long and complex process, in 2004 the UC Office of the President announced a national search for the broker that was to implement and administrate the postdoc benefits plan developed by the committee. UC ended up choosing GPA as the broker for what came to be known as the Postdoctoral Scholar Benefits Plan (PSBP).

GPA then developed a customized enrolment and benefit website, where postdocs would be able to make their benefit choices online. The PSBP was officially launched on January 1, 2005, and included medical, dental, vision, life, short-term disability and voluntary long-term disability coverage, with the goal to match faculty or staff benefits as closely as possible.

The PSBP is now in its eleventh year, and has acted as model to other universities across the country. GPA is proud of the PSBP, and firmly believes that it offers the most comprehensive and robust set of benefits available to postdocs in the United States, while including some of the lowest contribution levels in the history of postdoc health insurance.
The postdoc experience has become a hot topic of discussion across the U.S. Between the hubbub of postdoc-led groups such as Future of Research Boston, the National Academies 2014 report on “The Postdoctoral Experience Revisited,” and recent high-profile reports on the plight of the postdoc, national attention has focused on the structure and purpose of postdoctoral training. In the same spirit, a new group called P(ostdoc)-value* (P-value*) at UCSF has been actively advocating for improving the postdoc experience, both locally at UCSF and nationally.

In Fall 2014, a discussion at UCSF led by Dr Gregory Petsko, chair of the National Academies committee, and Dr Keith Yamamoto, on “Thinking Creatively About Postdocs” prompted a response within the postdoc community that their missing voice would add great value to this important conversation. P-value* formed as a grassroots think-tank of concerned UCSF postdocs seeking creative and actionable solutions to the unique challenges that today’s postdocs face. P-value* aims to both challenge and collaborate with administration officials at the local, regional, and national level to improve the postdoctoral training experience and lead in reforming biomedical training in the U.S.

P-value* hosted its first event, #ChangeThePostdoc, in March 2015 with UCSF’s Science Policy group, as an open forum with the entire community discussing local, actionable changes that could be implemented at UCSF. Dr. Henry Bourne, Professor Emeritus at UCSF, started off the event with advice to postdocs working for incremental change, including working in groups, picking your battles, and the importance of data to convince others. P-value* members presented 5 topics for improvement: (1) increasing autonomous funding grants for postdocs; (2) formally training PIs to mentor postdocs; (3) requiring tracking and transparency of postdoc career outcomes; (4) supporting postdocs with families; and (5) increasing structured career

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Helping UC Berkeley Faculty to Prepare Graduate Students and Postdocs for Non-academic Careers

When Dr. Doug Kalish, Visiting Scholar at UC Berkeley (UCB), obtained his PhD in biology 35 years ago he was the only student of his cohort to leave academia. In contrast, when I obtain my PhD in neuroscience next year, the job landscape for life scientists will look very different. According to a recent article published in Nature Biotech, while 36,000 PhDs in science and engineering were awarded in the U.S. in 2011, only 3,000 new faculty positions were created: that is a 12:1 ratio! As a result, PhDs’ career aspirations have been shifting towards non-academic careers in business, industry and government.

Faculty have mixed feelings about their graduate students and postdocs transitioning away from the tenure track. Reactions range from support and encouragement to open hostility. At the recent Beyond Academia conference at UCB, Associate Dean Rosemary Joyce asked attendees “to raise their hands if they had told their PIs they were attending.” Only half the participants did. Many graduate students and postdocs are still leery of confessing their career intentions to their PIs for fear of retribution and alienation.

There are, of course, faculty who want to support their graduate students and postdocs in the pursuit of any career path. However, as Kalish notes, “even with the best intentions, many faculty are ill-equipped for guiding their nonacademic PhDs because they have not been through the experience themselves.” Sandra Wulff, Graduate Studies Coordinator at the UC Office of the President, said that, “we see guidance for multiple career paths as an important issue.” It was while discussing issues regarding non-academic career development with Wulff that Kalish had an idea: why not provide motivated faculty with the resources and skills to counsel graduate students and postdocs about non-academic career options?

In December 2014, the California Institute for Quantitative Biosciences (QB3) at Berkeley sponsored a pilot workshop for around 15 faculty from the life sciences. According to Dr. Donna Hendrix, Managing Director of QB3-Berkeley, “Our mission is to further collaboration between the UC and industry. Familiarizing our faculty with the job search process is a crucial part of this goal.” Dr. Marla Feller, a professor in the MCB department who attended the workshop said, “Alternative careers is a big topic of conversation among the faculty here. The main difficulty is knowing how to guide our students. Resources like this workshop are eye-opening and helpful.” Kalish held the workshop, which provided information and tools on how to help their graduate students and postdocs navigate the nonacademic job search. Topics included what skills are required for a successful job hunt, the difference between a resumé and a CV, how to make industry internships work for the PhD and the PI, and how to emotionally support graduate students and postdocs who choose to pursue non-academic careers.

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Want to read some crazy statistics on coffee consumption in the United States and Europe? Well...

- The total percentage of Americans over the age of 18 that drink coffee every day is 54%.
- The total number of U.S. daily coffee drinkers who drink specialty beverages (like cappuccinos, mochas, lattes, etc.) is 30 million.
- The U.S. coffee market has reached $18 billion.
- The top three coffee-consuming countries in the world are, starting with the highest, Finland, Sweden and Switzerland (I was guessing Brazil as the lead, but who knew?).
- And, not surprisingly, the city with the most coffee shops in the U.S. is Seattle! Not a big surprise; I know I’ve been to intersections in Seattle where there is a Starbucks on at least two corners!

So, I guess I’ve made my point that coffee is very popular in the U.S. And, why? Well, my guess is that many of us crave that morning java boost of energy. It gets us moving and thinking clearly, due to the main ingredient, caffeine. Caffeine is a stimulant that is the most commonly consumed psychoactive substance in the world.2

According to the study, Effects of Caffeine on Mood and Performance by Carolyn F. Brice and Andrew P. Smith, drinking coffee affects various aspects of brain function, such as memory, mood, general reaction times and cognitive functioning. Here’s how it works: caffeine enters the bloodstream, heads for the brain, blocks an inhibitory transmitter called Adenosine, which then increases the amount of other neurotransmitters like dopamine, and then comes the enhanced firing of neurons which leads to all of the positive brain functioning!

It’s important for us as consumers to be aware of what we are putting in our bodies. What we eat and drink daily has a profound effect on our overall health. After reading many articles on the health benefits of coffee, I have come to the conclusion that I will continue to drink coffee daily, and will hopefully garner some of the many benefits that it appears to provide. I hope that this information will help you to decide if coffee is, or will become, your morning drink of choice!

1 Statistic Brain Research Institute, online facts, March 2015; Coffee-Statistics.com, 2015
QUESTION:
Dear Adam,
I am an international postdoc on a J-1 visa at UC Riverside and I recently had an encounter with the law. Last week, I went to a dinner party which served liquor. After dinner was over, the dinner hosts asked if I could drive home. For sure, I was not drunk as I only had two glasses of wine with the dinner. So, I proceeded to drive carefully home; however, during my drive home I was hit by another car. When the police arrived, they asked me if I had been drinking. Of course, I admitted the truth and told them that I had two glasses of wine. Once I said that, I was asked to participate in a sobriety test by counting backwards from 10,000 to 9,050. Because English is not my native language and because I was so nervous, I made many mistakes in counting backwards. Then, I was asked to take another test where you blow your breath into a machine so as to measure the amount of liquor in my system. According to the police, the California blood concentration alcohol limit is .08. Guess what? The machine registered .09 so I was arrested for Driving Under the Influence (DUI) and had to stay overnight in jail. As you can imagine, I was horrified with my first encounter with the legal system. Now, I am required to go to court so that they can hear my case with regard to punishing me for breaking the law. I am so scared that I will cause harm to my visa and my research possibilities in the U.S. Can you please provide me with advice as to how I should proceed? My court date is scheduled within the next three weeks. Please help me! I am sad and sorry.

ANSWER:
The impact on your visa status of a single conviction for a simple DUI is typically not going to terminate the J visa or current immigration status. It should not affect your ability to obtain either private or government grants. However, it is very wise to retain the services of a criminal attorney who handles these types of criminal charges in the court at which you will appear. It will be to your advantage for the attorney to attempt to have the charge reduced to a lesser charge, such as disorderly conduct. Hopefully, you will consider also retaining an immigration attorney who can work closely with the criminal attorney in getting you the best “deal”.

The most favorable outcome for you would be that the charges are totally dropped. In any event, even if the charges are dropped you have still been arrested, fingerprinted and your name is now in the US criminal databases. So, that means that on any immigration related forms you would always have to admit that you were arrested. The explanation to the US consul or immigration officer that the charges were eventually dropped, or reduced, will only come after your admission of the arrest. The consul will probably defer issuance of the visa until you have seen a local physician about your “drinking problem” and confirmed that you are not a “habitual drunkard”.

If the judge sentences you to probation or community service and even tells you that your record is sealed, for immigration purposes you will still have to admit that you had been arrested.

Based upon my experience, if you are ever arrested, for any reason, should you wish to be sponsored for an employment based green card (i.e. labor certification, national interest, extraordinary ability) an interview at the local immigration office will be required. If you have never been arrested an interview is highly unusual.

If you have been convicted of two DUls then it may be very difficult to immigrate to the U.S., or even to obtain a visa at a U.S. consulate. It certainly will affect your chances of ever becoming a US citizen since it must be established that you are a person of “good moral character.”

The Law Offices of Adam Green specializes in representation of postdoctoral scholars, especially their particular immigration issues including H visas, E visas, green cards and J visa waivers. If you have questions regarding the above information, obtaining work permission, or green cards, Adam is available for a free chat via email at adamgreen@earthlink.net. You may also call him at 323-852-6135.

Kalish observed that “the faculty were enthusiastic and engaged, and eager to share experiences.” For example, one issue was the challenge of matching the time frame of job-hunting with the academic research process and calendar. Most employers in industry expect new employees to start within 2-4 weeks after a job offer. PIs related stories of postdocs accepting an offer and leaving unfinished research or papers in the lab. Feller pointed out that an open dialogue between PIs and postdocs on the timing of the job search could reduce “surprise” departures and provide for a transition that would work for both the PIs and the graduate students and postdocs.

There’s been interest in holding similar workshops from UC Santa Barbara and UC Irvine, as well as from professional societies. With a growing number of non-academic graduate career counselors, student-led initiatives, and faculty education, we are looking at a revolution in the way in which graduate students and postdocs are being prepared by their universities for non-academic careers.

About the author:
Claire Oldfield is a 5th Year graduate student in Neurobiology at UC-Berkeley and a co-founder of the student-led initiative Beyond Academia.
Bringing the Whole Family to CAL: AN INTERVIEW WITH NEW ARRIVALS
by Natasha Distiller

Manel Molina Ruiz and Ana Muñoz Museros are a Spanish couple who have recently joined the UC Visiting Scholar community. They’ve had an interesting journey thus far, even though it has only just begun.

And it began in whirlwind fashion. Just over 6 months ago, Manel popped the question: he asked Ana if she wanted to go to California. After exploring his options closer to home in Europe, he had successfully pursued a Research Scholar placement in Prof. Frances Hellman’s Physics Lab at Cal. Despite knowing very little about California and not being fluent in English, she said yes. They got married, sold everything, arranged passports for themselves and their two dogs (yes – the dogs have bona fide, or perhaps bona fido, EU passports), and left Barcelona. They laugh when they recount those hectic months, showing the openness of spirit that has stood them in such good stead through this process.

Ana says she had no hesitation in choosing to accompany Manel, and she made major changes to make this possible. She left her job as an IT teacher. Leaving the dogs, however, was a step too far. They found it was almost impossible to find a place in or near Berkeley to rent with their two dogs, Tula, a middle-sized terrier mix and Braulio, a shepherd/husky mix. Braulio, at 70-odd pounds, was simply too large for an American landlord to consider. After continually expanding their search parameters, they eventually found a place in Concord that would accept him. This happened only three weeks before they were due to leave their home.

And the stress didn’t end there. They found the process of getting the dogs from Europe to the United States to be onerous. European vets knew very little about what needed to be done, and Manel and Ana embarked on a long administrative and medical process to enable them to import their beloved dogs. All of their vaccines had to be verified, and they needed rabies shots right before the journey. Once they arrived in the States, they had to revaccinate, and license the dogs. They also chose their flight company very carefully, bearing in mind that the dogs would need to take a connecting flight to make it all the way to San Francisco. They wanted to ensure that they would all be on the same airline for both flights, to avoid the risk of losing them in transit. They chose KLM. In the event, they missed their connecting flight in Amsterdam due to bad weather. They spent the intervening 24 hours periodically calling the dog hotel to check on the animals. The dogs, they report, were exhausted when they were finally reunited, and Ana says she was saddened to see how hard the journey had been on them. Overall, however, Manel and Ana were happy with the treatment their animals received with KLM. They and the crates were clean, and the dogs had been walked. Two hours after they were all reunited, the dogs were back to their normal happy selves, and they say it has been well worth it to have the dogs with them in America.

Braulio and Tula have discovered carpets in their Concord house. In Spain, Manel says, there are no carpets, so this is a happy first. Tula now considers the entire apartment her bed, Ana says with a smile. Braulio enjoys the California wildlife, and managed to get skunked almost immediately upon arrival.

Ana enjoys living in Concord, since it borders on a large open area that is perfect for the dogs. She has made good friends with a neighbor.

Manel and she bike and BART between Concord and Berkeley, getting off at Rockridge and riding to campus. They find Berkeley very European, similar in many ways to Barcelona. One difference, they report, is that the public transport is not as well maintained as they are used to. In general, they notice that public infrastructure seems to be old, compared to Spain. But the people, they say, are very open and friendly, and this, too, is quite European in flavor.

Ana has a Communication and Marketing degree, and is waiting for the legal process that will enable her to work here. In the meantime she is making use of the English acquisition courses offered by the VSPA through The Language Company. She has the advantage also of understanding the Spanish that is spoken here, despite a difference in accent; the musicality is very different, she says, but she has no problem speaking to other Spanish-speakers. They talk with interest about the different American accents they have encountered, and how curious it is that their neighbor from New York told them she also struggled to understand Californian when she first arrived here. The dogs, they tell me, speak only Catalan to other humans, but they communicate perfectly with American dogs — Manel says they can smell butts in any language.

The first phrase Ana learned here, she says, was, “Cute dog!” She does sometimes wish English-speakers would be a little more patient with her, including being willing to find alternative vocabulary when she doesn’t understand them, rather than just raising their voices. Being European, much of their exposure to English has been...
from which she received support and informal advice. Selena used the information and connections she had gained in her application, which had to justify the benefits and appropriateness of UCSB to her research.

Because she was prepared, Selena was able to utilize all the resources and opportunities relevant to her research from the moment she arrived to Santa Barbara. Despite being jet-lagged, the day after she arrived she started auditing courses. And because she had been in contact with numerous colleagues from various departments, it was easy for Selena to meet and discuss her research with them upon arrival. Because she was familiar with the network of Italian scholars in California, she could attend their conferences. She was invited to give a keynote lecture at UCLA, and to be a guest lecturer at California State University, Long Beach, which gave her a means to begin establishing herself as a member of California’s Italian studies community. The happy combination of thorough planning and a welcoming and supportive academic environment has resulted in a highly successful postdoc experience for Selena.

The postdoc ride is not always as smooth. Sytske Besemer is a postdoc in criminology at UC Berkeley. Funded by the Dutch government, Sytske identified a Berkeley professor who worked in her field and was willing to host her. Sytske visited Berkeley in August 2012, a few months before the start of her postdoc in October, and was introduced to her lab colleagues by her host professor. However, Sytske was not introduced to her other departmental colleagues, nor was she invited to participate in meetings and events, an often typical experience for foreign postdocs new to the American academic patronage system. As a result, “I felt lonely in the beginning. I didn’t know anyone and no one knew I had arrived.” This was a shocking transition from her graduate program in Cambridge, England, where Sytske was integrated into the department and the university from day one.

Illustrating the importance of a proactive approach and lateral thinking, Sytske took steps to improve her situation. First, she took the opportunity to teach statistics to inmate students at San Quentin’s Prison University Project. This allowed Sytske to gain knowledge of a maximum-security prison, giving this passionate criminologist an inside view of the U.S. criminal justice system. The experience was both personally and professionally rewarding. Sytske feels that she has been able to give something back. She feels that the U.S. criminal justice system is highly problematic, and her volunteer teaching gives inmates, who are taking pre-college and college level courses, the positive attention and education they need to begin to access new opportunities. And the teaching has been an enriching pedagogical experience, especially since teaching experience for postdocs can be hard to come by. Sytske found that teaching has helped her better understand her own work. “You realize that some things you take for granted, but that doesn’t mean you can teach them,” Sytske explains.

Sytske dealt with her isolation by joining the UC Berkeley Humanities and Social Sciences Association (HSSA). The HSSA offers academic, social, and career development resources to postdocs, visiting scholars, and graduate students. She became Vice-President and Writing Group Officer. “The HSSA changed my experiences in Berkeley. Suddenly I found my community,” Sytske says emphatically. She is especially happy with the weekly interdisciplinary writing group, which offers constructive feedback on papers intended for publication, and which she has spearheaded since 2013. Sytske ends with words of advice to all UC postdocs in HSS, which echo the successful experiences of Selena: “My advice is, be very pro-active, and [if you are based at UC Berkeley] join the HSSA.” Other campuses throughout the UC system have their own postdoc social and support groups, too, and some are beginning to acknowledge HSS academics.

While Selena has successfully focused on getting the most out of her academic environment, and Sytske found volunteering opportunities which have helped her develop her research and teaching, the third postdoc the Newsletter interviewed found ways to develop skills that go beyond research and teaching to further his career.

Paul Cisneros, a postdoc at UC Davis in the Department of Environmental Sciences and Policy, with funding and a PhD in social sciences from Ecuador, speaks of how he initially only focused on his research. Upon arrival, he received the support he needed from his Principal Investigator (PI) and his department, and could begin his research on water management in Ecuador without major delays. However, he quickly felt that more information about career development opportunities for postdocs would have been helpful. He identifies the lack of this information as a problem for paid-direct postdocs in general.

Paul found that if he looked, resources for further career development were available to him at Davis. Having missed out on this aspect during his graduate studies meant that Paul was forced to start from scratch. He had the motivation and energy to do so, since he is adamant to make himself as attractive as possible to employers in the United States. Paul looked for workshops and seminars on career development, searched the web, looked out for flyers, and was helped by UC Davis staff working on postdoc benefits. Before he knew it, Paul had attended events on writing skills, teaching, and group and project management. He says, with a genuine sense of achievement, that these experiences have had an immediate impact on his prospects and research, not least because he has been able to dramatically extend his network through them.
All three of the postdocs have had rich experiences in the UC system. In part, this has been because each of them has been proactive and creative about making the most of what the system has to offer them. It has not always been easy. It can be lonely and overwhelming to be new, to start again. But what each of their stories illustrates, beside the importance of taking the initiative, is the range of opportunities, personal and professional, that exist for HSS postdocs in the UC system.

The Humanities and Social Sciences Postdoc: The Yesterday, the Today and the Call for Tomorrow

term awards, ranging from a few months to a year. Unfortunately, when the economy collapsed in 2008, postdoctoral fellowships became a stop-gap measure to prevent unemployment among recent HSS graduates. This “emergency model” has given rise to the myriad of postdoctoral fellowships that are now available in the HSS fields. These positions were created by both universities and outside funders without any clear directive on the structure of the position or the responsibilities that accompany them.

HSS PhDs have the same level of accomplishment and skill sets as their STEM counterparts. They are fantastic problem solvers; they have excellent time and project-management skills; they can excel in communicating both orally and via the written medium; they are detail-oriented; they are good team players; and finally, they have a thirst for knowledge. While these qualities would make people with doctoral degrees highly sought out in the job market, the steady decline in the number of jobs available for such people has turned these stopgap programs into more permanent positions.

The postdoctoral years are designed to provide important and additional training to launch a career into academia. These years of grueling work schedules are meant to shape the crème-de-la-crème of academic society, the people who will become pioneers and change our outlook of the world. The HSS postdoctoral positions, like the STEM ones, however, suffer from major systemic flaws. To begin with, there is no structure to the programs. Some funding agencies offer a two-month program while others offer two years. The pay is not commensurate with the efforts and hours put in, although with the Mellon foundation fellowships, the humanities postdocs make more money than their STEM counterparts. The resources to aid in training of postdocs are near non-existent and when present are not collated in a comprehensible manner. The HSS postdocs were created as an emergency measure to prevent unemployment, but have morphed into semi-permanent positions. Long-term sustenance of any short term project requires major remodeling of the structure of the programs; and that still needs to be achieved for the HSS postdoc positions. Further, resources like the Individual Development Plan, are available only to the STEM postdocs via the myIDP website. Similar resources to advance the professional development of HSS postdocs are lacking.

However, longtime supporters of the HSS postdocs like the Versatile PhD and the Graduate Career Consortium are working hard to change that.

The National Postdoctoral Association (NPA) was created with the mission to “improve the postdoctoral experience by supporting enhanced research training and a culture of enhanced professional growth to benefit scholarship and innovation.” It seeks to “promote diversity and ensure equal opportunity and inclusion for all persons in the membership, leadership and activities of the National Postdoctoral Association.” The NPA website contains several resources that can be of use to every postdoc. For instance, knowing the core competencies for every postdoc and working on an individual development plan will help advance careers. There are also toolkits in place to help jumpstart an institution’s postdoctoral association. The website, moreover, has resources for international postdocs. The NPA also publishes a quarterly newsletter called the POSTDOCket that seeks to inform and educate via news about policy changes, career advice and life advice.

Currently, STEM postdoctoral fellows make up the majority of the members of the NPA. However, the NPA would like to be the voice of all postdoctoral fellows in the country. On the one hand, having HSS postdocs as members of the NPA will help create resources specific for HSS postdocs and help organize the NPA’s resources to effectively reach the HSS postdoc. On the other hand, being a member of the NPA can help HSS postdocs add their voice to the national dialogue, find a group of peers willing to listen, lobby for change and help make the postdoctoral experience as fulfilling and fruitful as possible: a win-win situation for all.

The Awards Ceremony, where the best presentations of the day were awarded and prestigious campus- and UC-wide postdoctoral awards were presented, crowned the day. Vice Provost of Graduate Education and Dean of Graduate Studies Jeffery C. Gibeling presented two scholars with the Award for Excellence in Postdoctoral Research, an honor presented to postdoctoral scholars for their outstanding

The UC Davis Postdoctoral Scholars’ Postdoctoral Research Symposium continued into the lunch break and the social hour at the end of the day. Many attendees felt that the symposium was an unprecedented opportunity for postdoctoral researchers to meet and learn from each other. The symposium also served as great training opportunity for postdocs who volunteered as session chairs, abstract raters, presentation judges and for other organizational aspects, bringing the event together as a celebration of postdoctoral excellence at UC Davis.

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research at UC Davis. Parth H. Pathak received the award for his contributions in the field of computer science and Hyeong-Moo Shin for his research in public health sciences. Dean Gibeling also recognized four awardees of the very prestigious Chancellor’s Postdoctoral Fellowship Program, a fellowship given to postdoctoral researchers who specifically focus on developing modes of public service that address the current state of our society, advancing the potential accesses to higher education, and understanding inequalities that deal with factors of race, gender, disabilities, or the LGBT community. The four recipients were Javier Arbona for his research of military landscapes in American Studies, Lindsey Dillion for her work in examining the geographies of toxic waste in American Studies, Sarah Hird for her research of microbial biodiversity at the Genome Center, and Felipe Godinez for his development of a high image resolution postiron emission tomography scanning for human extremities in Biomedical Engineering.

Based on the merit of their presentations and posters, 14 symposium participants were presented with Best Talk or Best Poster Awards along with a prize of $500.

For more information on the symposium and the participants, view the UC Davis Postdoctoral Research Symposium program booklet.

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**POSTDOC THINK TANK**

*P-value* Works for Change at UCSF

P-value* is now shifting its efforts toward implementing positive changes in postdoctoral training. P-value* members are part of a UCSF taskforce committee on postdoc mentoring, where they have shared ideas on PI training and transparency in tracking postdoc outcomes. Moreover, P-value* has been collaborating with the UCSF Committee on Family Services, the UC Office of the President, and the UAW Postdoc Union to make postdocs eligible to receive flexible spending accounts to pay for childcare pre-tax, a benefit that is currently only available to UC faculty, staff, and graduate students. Thirdly, P-value* has been working with the Graduate Division and Office of Postdoctoral Scholars to provide peer-to-peer mentoring support groups to foster a postdoc community at UCSF. Fourth, P-value* is developing a pilot program for professional experience education for UCSF postdocs, together with UCSF’s Office of Career and Professional Development. Fifth, P-value* is working to establish an industry site visit program at UCSF, akin to UC Berkeley’s Postdoc Industry Exploration Program (PIEP). In addition, P-value* is continually meeting with UCSF administrators to bring attention to postdoc concerns.

P-value* is focused on organizing postdocs to voice their ideas and to work to put these changes in place. With current attention on the status of postdocs, it behoves us all to speak up about what can be improved, and to make these things happen. For more information, to get involved, or to share your ideas for improvements for postdocs, you can contact P-value* at pvalueucsf@gmail.com.

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**FAREWELL**

Linda Scott

UC RIVERSIDE

» Continued from page 2

Childers singles out one out of many cases that exhibits Scott’s amazing willingness and capacity to help a student in need. An issue arose a few years ago with an international graduate student who had requested a prolonged leave of absence. The reason for this request was unusual: the student was suffering from fairly advanced cancer. This student went to Scott and told Scott that she wanted to complete her program and earn her PhD. But in order to do that, she needed to return her country and receive medical care, which would mean taking out more leave than was normally permitted by the program. Scott made sure that Childers knew that this was an extraordinary case, and that the right thing to do was to grant the student the extra leave. Not only that, Scott made sure that the student was granted leave. Not only that, Scott made sure that the student was granted the leave and that, upon her return after a successful treatment, she would still have funding and work with faculty members who had been appraised by Scott of the student’s situation. This story has a dual happy ending: the student’s cancer went into remission, and she earned her PhD. But in order to do that, she needed to return to her country and receive medical care, which would mean taking out more leave than was normally permitted by the program.

That same resoluteness, influence, and extensive knowledge shine through in Scott’s role as postdoc appointment manager. When postdocs at Riverside were unionized through UAW, the shift was relatively smooth, since graduate students had earlier successfully unionized through the UAW, thus felicitously creating a useful model of transition for postdoc unionization. However, postdoc unionization meant that most staff and faculty had to be educated about new policies. Scott, in Childers’ words, took on the role of...
educator “both willingly and gracefully,” doing an extraordinary job in making the transition “without a hitch.” Indeed, from day one on her job as postdoc appointment manager, Scott has been a tremendous resource for postdocs regarding all aspects of their stay: from appointment, to payment, to benefits, to labor relations, to various kinds of support.

The Graduate Division, together with the Riverside Postdoctoral Association, continue to provide for their postdocs in the wake of Scott’s departure. Childers points to their numerous resources and services for the professional and academic development of their postdocs. One is the section within the Graduate Division called GradSuccess, which is open to all postdocs. GradSuccess offers workshops, seminars, and consultations on advanced pedagogical training, writing, job applications, and a program called GradQuant, which helps students develop their quantitative research skills.

Riverside’s Postdoctoral Association has grown in the last two years, supported financially by the Graduate Division. In the fall of 2014, the Association held its first symposium featuring poster and paper presentations and a keynote speech by Nobel Laureate in Medicine Randy Schekman. The Association now has an important advisory role giving the Graduate Division input on the needs of the Riverside postdoc community.

Driven by Scott’s energy and dedication, the Graduate Division at UC Riverside has long been serving its postdocs. Now that she has retired, it will take what it has learned from her and continue to grow.

I asked them what advice they would have for other new Visiting Scholars. “Be patient, and be calm,” is the first thing that comes to their minds. The next is, expect ambiguity in the responses you get from Californians. Ana tells me, “Here, people don’t say ‘yes’ or ‘no’. They say, well…” Manel gives the example of trying to negotiate with a potential landlord about accepting the dogs. He asked if she could make an exception to her size rule for Braulio. She replied by repeating the policy. He asked again, reiterating that he understood the policy. She replied that she hoped in the future he would stay with them. He, in turn, wondered if she had forgotten about the dog. So, they say, to incoming non-Americans, expect people to be polite to the point of vagueness. As a non-American myself, I can confirm the veracity of this advice!

They plan to stay for at least two or three years, having been through so much to bring the whole family. Manel is very busy settling into his lab, and is enjoying his work. They placed an Ikea order from Spain, and were still putting their apartment together when we met. They are also getting all their paperwork in order. They laugh ruefully about the amount of admin that is required here, and how everything requires a social security number, which takes a while to arrive. Once they have the time, they plan to start attending VSPA social events. Ana is looking forward to improving her English and finding work, and they both continue to delight in everything they are learning about America.

Bringing the Whole Family to CAL: AN INTERVIEW WITH NEW ARRIVALS

through Britain, and they enjoy the differences they are discovering in the U.S. Manel tells a very funny story of being asked for the first time by a cashier if he wanted cash back. He was amazed that she was offering him money… And Ana finds it interesting that people seemed highly concerned with safety, but leave Amazon packages on their doorsteps. She was taken aback that the TV they ordered was left on their driveway. If things are so dangerous, she wonders, why do people not lock things up more? Ana has been writing a Spanish blog about her time here, called “Aventuras Californianas”, which, if her conversation is anything to go by, will be both amusing and informative for incoming VSPA community Spanish-speakers.

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