

NIEHS career fair showcases career options

By Monica Frazier

The 16th annual NIEHS Biomedical Career Fair took place April 26 on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's campus in Research Triangle Park, N.C.

The event, planned and organized by members of the NIEHS Trainees Assembly and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's postdoc community, was an opportunity to network with and learn from invited panelists and speakers, visit participating vendors, and get advice about curriculum vitae (CV) and resumes from experts.

This year's career fair was organized with the wide range of attendees in mind, and offered concurrent panel sessions for those following traditional career routes, careers away from the bench, and non-traditional careers for Ph.D. scientists.

Co-chairs [Staton Wade, Ph.D.](#), and [Kymberly Gowdy, Ph.D.](#), were excited about the varied selection of career panels and workshops the planning committee was able to put together this year. "We really highlighted diverse options and, hopefully, let trainees know where they can fit both within and outside of the traditional research field," Wade commented.

A motivating keynote

The fair opened with a keynote address by Patricia Beckmann, Ph.D., titled "A Crook in the Road: A Real World Path in Bioscience Entrepreneurship." She candidly told the audience about her career path, which included academic and industry positions, ranging from technician, to co-inventor of the drug Enbrel, to founder of Biostrategy LLC.

Her presentation was perfectly correlated with the theme of the fair and included details of how she embraced opportunities in different segments of biomedical science, without fear of failure, and sought out challenges to advance her career in entrepreneurship. Failure in a venture, as Beckmann noted, can be utilized as a way to move forward into the future. For many people, she said, "It is best to fail until you succeed."

Beckmann related entrepreneurship to everyone in the audience, by describing it as an attitude for life. She proposed that everyone is an entrepreneur on some level, whether in the task of determining how to clone a gene more efficiently, or how to get a child ready to go in the morning more quickly. She described all these tasks as levels of opportunity in entrepreneurship.

"My evolution started as a scientist and as an entrepreneur, because I was given opportunity. Opportunity is really important. Look for it and find something that challenges you and your passion," Beckman said.

Panels and workshops for every interest

Career panels gave attendees opportunities to ask questions of respected members of many different scientific communities, and included sessions on running a successful lab, science policy, contract research organizations, consulting, drug development, program administration, and several other topics. Panelists gave insight into how they broke into their field, what daily life in their position involves, and how attendees interested in a specific path can prepare themselves for that market.



NIEHS Deputy Scientific Director William Schrader, Ph.D., welcomed career fair attendees and encouraged networking during the day's events. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



Staton Wade, Ph.D., co-chair of the NIEHS Career Fair Committee, opened the event by emphasizing its theme — career options. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



Keynote speaker Beckmann candidly spoke to the career fair attendees about her career path, and encouraged the audience to be creative and willing to accept new challenges in their careers. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)

Workshops proved to be very popular among attendees, in such areas as networking, management and leadership skills, the interview process, and knowing an individual's career value, providing guidance on additional skill sets needed, beyond scientific training, to help get the position desired. Throughout the day, attendees were able to sign up for personal assessments of their CV or resume by career services experts in their market of interest – industry, government, or academic.

Despite the full schedule of events, attendees were given multiple opportunities to network with other participants, panelists, and speakers.

Gowdy summed up the committee's mission by saying, "We hope that the attendees took away a broad knowledge of what they can accomplish with a Ph.D., and are better able to explore the multitude of career choices available in the biomedical sciences."

(Monica Frazier, Ph.D., is an Intramural Research Training Award fellow in the NIEHS Mechanisms of Mutation Group.)



NIEHS visiting fellow Anders Clausen, Ph.D., listened to advice during the panel session on "Running a Successful Lab." (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



Roger Woodgate, Ph.D., right, of the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, responded to questions during the "Running a Successful Lab" session. Also on the panel were Alison Harrill, Ph.D., left, of the Hamner Institutes for Health Sciences, and Sue Jinks-Robertson, Ph.D., of Duke University. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



NIEHS fellow Tracy Clement, Ph.D., led a discussion on "Making the Most of LinkedIn," in one of the fair's two lunchtime sessions. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



Attendees listened intently, during panel discussions at the career fair. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



Former trainees Thaddeus Schug, Ph.D., left, NIEHS health scientist administrator, and Jana Stone, Ph.D., scientific coordinator at Duke University, were panelists for the program administration and grant management session. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



NIEHS program administrator Michael Humble, Ph.D., answered questions during a panel discussion on “Overseeing Science: Program Administration and Grant Management” – one of many sessions offered on nontraditional career paths. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



Former NIEHS fellow Cynthia Holley, Ph.D., took questions during the panel session on “Contract Research Organizations.” (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



Dara Wilson-Grant, associate director of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Office of Postdoctoral Affairs, advised attendees in the proper use of networking, while building professional relationships. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



Diane Klotz, Ph.D., former director of the NIEHS Office of Fellows' Career Development, was a presenter at this year's career fair. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



The 2013 NIEHS Biomedical Career Fair Committee included trainees from NIEHS and EPA. Shown standing, left to right, are NIEHS trainees Georgette Charles, Ph.D.; Julie Hall, Ph.D.; Bethany Hsia, Ph.D.; Kimberly Wiggins, Ph.D.; Margaret Adgent, Ph.D.; Neal Englert, Ph.D.; Maria Shatz, Ph.D.; Christine Ekenga, Ph.D.; and Michelle Oakes of EPA. Seated, left to right, are EPA trainees Jennifer Nichols, Ph.D., and William Polk, Ph.D.; and NIEHS trainees Wade; Gowdy; Wei Qu, Ph.D.; and Rachel Goldsmith, Ph.D. Not pictured are EPA trainee Dayne Filer and NIEHS trainees Jacqueline de Marchena, Ph.D.; Queying (Charlene) Ding; and Bret Freudenthal, Ph.D. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)

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