

Training & Capacity Building

June 2014

Tammy Collins: Providing Professional Development Opportunities for NIEHS Fellows

By: Sara Mishamandani

When Tammy Collins, Ph.D., was hired to direct the [Office of Fellows' Career Development \(OFCD\)](#) in 2012, she was already working with postdoctoral fellows at NIEHS to develop trainings and outreach opportunities as the Chair of the NIEHS Trainees' Assembly. A former postdoctoral fellow in the NIEHS Laboratory of Molecular Genetics branch, Collins now provides NIEHS trainees with much-needed professional development services to supplement their NIEHS research.

“When I came to NIEHS as a basic scientist, I didn't know what my career was going to be,” said Collins. “Through my involvement with the Trainees' Assembly, I worked with a committee to plan workshops and programming for postdoctoral fellows and found that I really enjoyed interacting with a broad group of trainees to help them navigate professional experiences that supplemented their bench work.”



As the director of the OFCD, Collins oversees seminars, courses, and workshops that provide critical skills for future careers. These workshops range from basic writing and management to searching for and interviewing for jobs. The NIEHS Trainees' Assembly works closely with the OFCD to hold an annual career fair, now in its 17th year that attracts more than 350 people from NIEHS and local universities. Collins also produces biweekly newsletters with professional development events and job opportunities, and provides individual consultation meetings to assist trainees with job applications and résumés, mock interviews, and career advice.

Improving career development for trainees

In 2013, Collins led the charge to develop and send out an in-depth survey to all fellows, including a specific subsection for international fellows, to better understand how the OFCD could help meet their needs.

“We found that international fellows felt they would benefit most from additional help with communication and job-searching skills in the U.S.,” said Collins. “As a result of the survey, we developed specific

workshops catered toward international fellows, and we publicize programs that will help facilitate scientific writing and communication in English.”

In the past year, OFCD has held workshops specifically designed for international fellows, such as identifying common English grammar mistakes in academic writing and improving spoken English. They have also provided opportunities for all fellows through programs that address international needs including job search strategies, giving presentations, grant writing, writing and publishing scientific papers, as well as a wide range of other opportunities.

Putting a global perspective on training

The OFCD not only provides practical advice to international trainees, it is also including global environmental health in its programs. For the first time this summer, OFCD is facilitating a series of courses on global environmental health topics that will be taught by NIEHS fellows and scientists. These courses will not only raise awareness of global environmental health issues for high school and undergraduate trainees, but will also help fellows put their own research into a broader global perspective.

Other new initiatives led by OFCD include a workshop for the trainees to learn about finding careers abroad and how to secure funding for global work, and the opportunity to hear from NIH alumni who work internationally.

Even with an already long list of priorities to be addressed by workshops, Collins continues to search for unmet needs in training through individual meetings and events.

“I have seen a number of NIEHS postdoctoral fellows who are in roles similar to mine related to professional development of scientists,” said Collins. “I think this is because of NIEHS’s historically strong professional development programs. The Institute has been ahead of the curve in providing fellows with an idea of available career paths and programs to attain those career paths.”