

2015 Postdoctoral Survey Summary

Below is a brief summary of the findings from the 2015 postdoctoral survey. As in past surveys, the original invitation and 2 follow-up e-mails were sent to all postdocs (N = 204) to encourage participation in the web-based annual survey. A total of 105 responses were received in 2015, providing us with a 51% response rate.

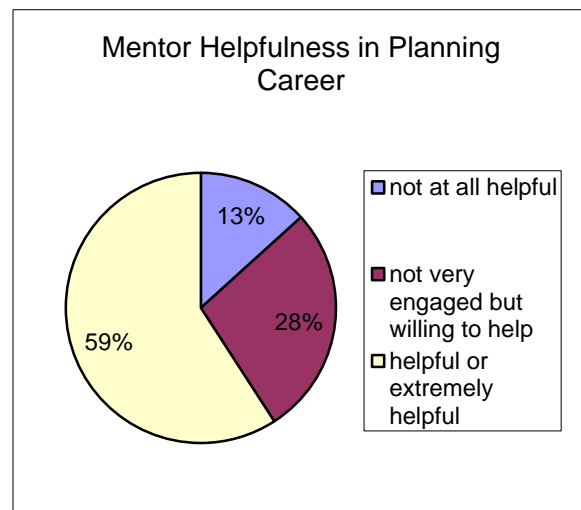
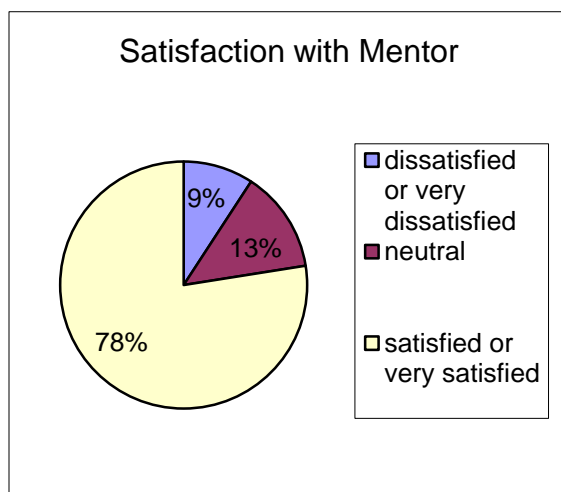
The Respondents: Below is information about the respondents compared to what we know about all postdocs at VCU. There appear to be some differences between respondents and all postdocs on the characteristics for which we have data. Respondents were somewhat more likely to be U.S. citizens or permanent residents and female, they were less likely to have been at VCU for less than a year, and to have held more than one postdoc position (36% of respondents have been in more than one position, compared to 30% of all postdocs). A larger percentage of the respondents were in the Humanities and Sciences (22%) compared to the overall postdoc population (11%). Interestingly, overall, during the last several years we have seen the percentage of postdocs in the School of Medicine (SoM) decrease. Whereas in previous years, anywhere from 74% - 79% of postdocs were in the SoM, in Fall 2015, that percentage was 63%. There are not significant changes in other demographic characteristics over time. [view previous reports here: http://www.research.vcu.edu/postdoc/postdoc_survey_summary_archive.pdf]

Characteristics of Survey Respondents compared to all VCU postdoctoral scholars (Fall 2015)

	Respondents N = 105	All postdoctoral scholars N = 204
Citizenship	44% citizens or permanent resident	41% citizens or permanent resident
Gender	48% female	41% female
Age	<31 years = 24 % 31–39 years = 62% 40+ years = 14%	NA
Marital Status	62% married or w/partner	NA
Children <18	35% w/children	NA
Time as postdoc at VCU	<1 year = 28% 1-4 years = 68% 5+ years = 4%	<1 year = 33% 1-4 years = 65% 5+ years = 3%
Total # postdoc positions	1 position = 64% 2 positions = 29% 3 or more = 7%	1 position = 70% 2 positions = 26% 3 or more = 4%
School/College of Respondents	Medicine = 61% H & S = 22% Pharmacy = 7% Engineering = 6% Other = 4%	Medicine = 63% H & S = 11% Pharmacy = 9% Engineering = 10% Other = 7%

Career aspirations: Almost 43% of the respondents indicated that their main career goal was to be a tenure-track faculty member, with another 12% stating that some other type of academic position was their main career goal. Just over 14% were interested in working in industry, 18% were interested in positions ranging from government (NIH, CDC, etc.) to science writing, and almost 11% were not sure of their main career goal. Almost 30% are actively looking for their next position, and over 38% plan to actively start seeking their next position within 12 months.

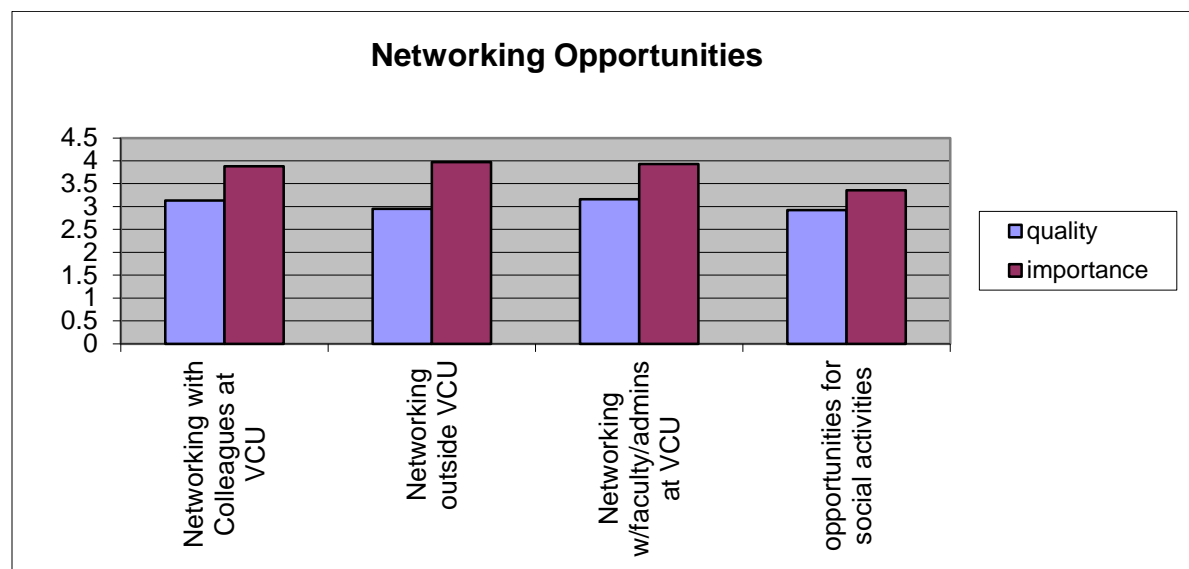
Career preparation: Approximately 19% of the 2015 respondents stated they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their publication record, with 48% being neutral on this question, and 33% satisfied or very satisfied. Just over 36% felt they had not presented their research at conferences often enough. However, almost three-quarters (74%) felt their research training and experience was good or excellent, with only 6% (N=6), responding that their training was poor. Most postdocs also rated the mentoring they are receiving as good (41%) or excellent (29%), with 20% being neutral and 10% indicating their mentoring was poor or very poor. We also asked respondents how satisfied they were with their mentor and how engaged their mentor was in helping them plan their next career move. When asked how often they meet with their mentor to discuss work and career, 17.3% responded that they meet daily and 53% responded that they meet weekly. However, almost a quarter of respondents indicated they only meet with their mentor monthly.



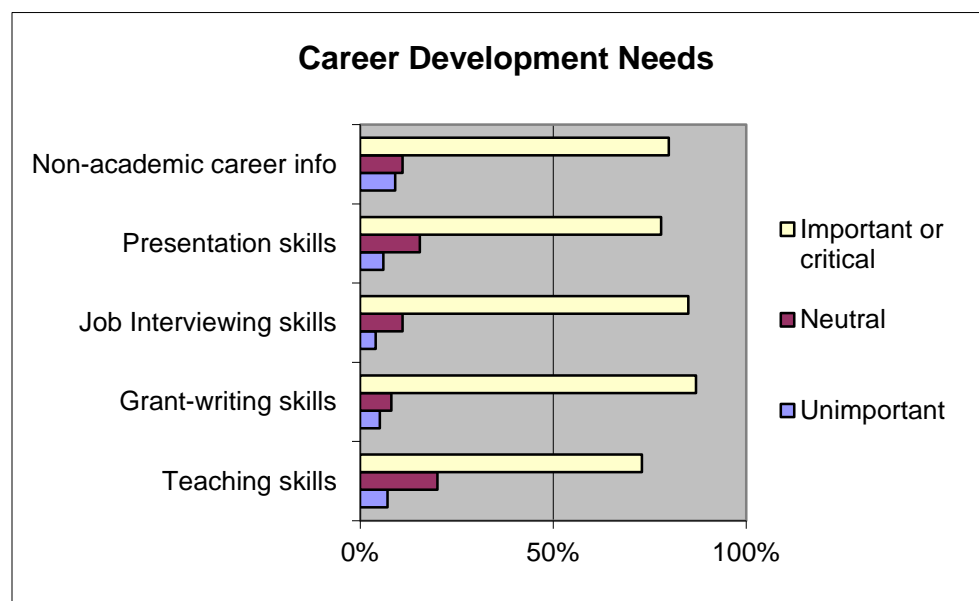
We asked respondents if they had developed a written career plan for themselves and if they had shared that plan with their mentors. Less than 25% of the respondents indicated they had completed a career plan, however, of those who completed a plan, over 80% of them had shared that plan with their mentor. Many postdocs perceived their mentors to be helpful or extremely helpful (59%), or at least willing to help in their career planning (28%). However when asked how comfortable they were in discussing their next career move with their mentor 15% indicated that they were uncomfortable or very uncomfortable having this discussion.

Networking: Postdocs were asked to assess the quality of various networking opportunities and social activities at VCU, and to rate how important these opportunities/activities were to them. On a scale of 1 (low) to high (5), the mean rating for the quality of networking activities whether

at VCU or outside VCU, is lower than the importance the respondents place on these activities. As with respondents in past surveys, networking outside VCU was rated as very important, but a substantial percentage (over 28%) of the respondents rated the quality of their networking opportunities outside VCU as poor or very poor.

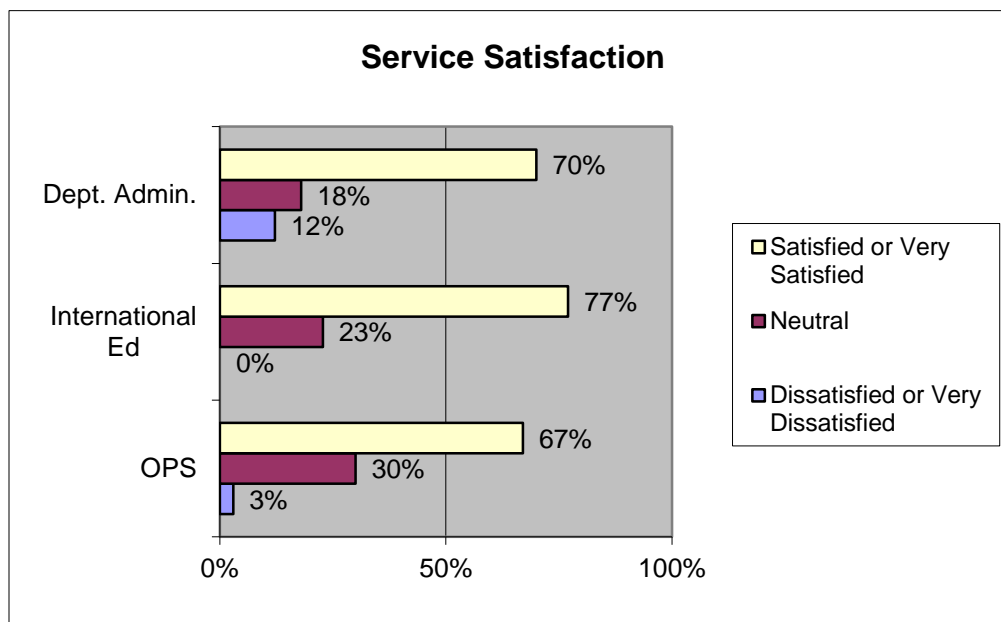
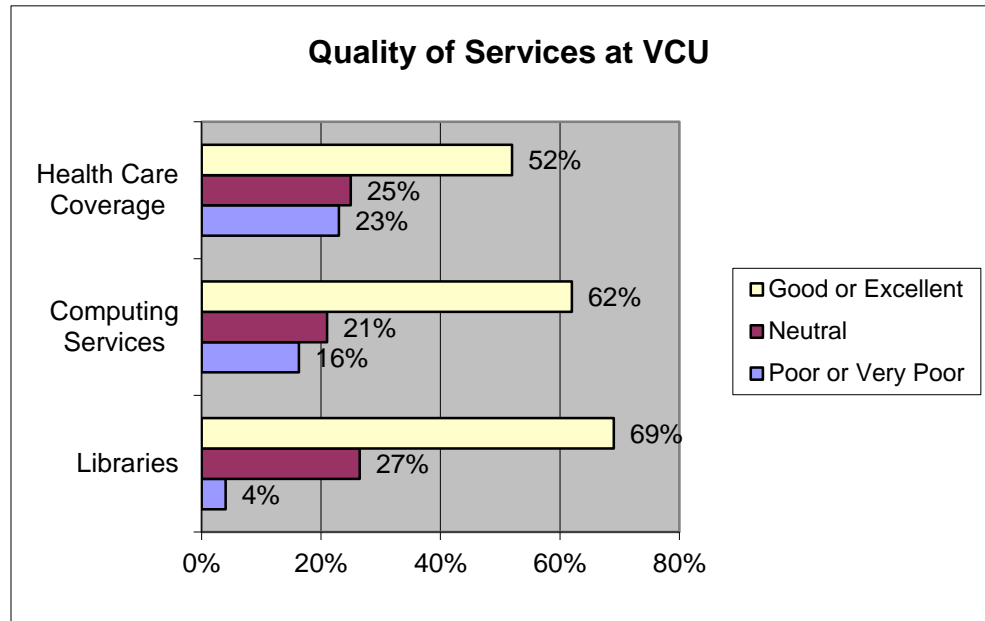


Career development activities: To help the Office of Postdoctoral Services in its planning, respondents were asked how important it is for them to receive training in a variety of areas. While grant writing has consistently been the most important need expressed by respondents, non-academic career information and job interviewing skills have increased in importance among respondents over the years. In this year's survey, 80% of all respondents indicated that non-academic career information was important or critical to them. This compares to just over 50% in our 2009 survey.



Services available to Postdocs: Respondents were asked to rate the quality and satisfaction of a variety of services available to them at VCU. We do see a substantial number of respondents who indicated they were “neutral” on these questions. This is likely a function of the percentage

who have been at VCU for less than a year, and thus have had limited experience with the service. In general, postdoctoral scholars are quite satisfied with the services available to them at VCU. Healthcare coverage continues to be one area of concern. Just over 23% of this year's respondents rated coverage as very poor or poor, and only 52% rated it as good or excellent. Open ended comments indicate considerable concern about cost and family coverage.



Overall satisfaction with postdoctoral experience at VCU: 64% of the respondents rated their experience at VCU as a postdoc as either satisfied (47%) or very satisfied (17%), whereas 13% (N = 13) were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied, and 22% were neutral. We also asked respondents how valued they felt at VCU. Almost 25% indicated they were not valued and another 26% felt only mildly valued. Compared to last year's respondents, the 2015 postdoctoral respondents feel less valued and are somewhat less satisfied with their experience here at VCU.

When asked for additional comments to explain their response to this question, respondents noted such things “Outside of my immediate mentor, there are not good opportunities to develop collaborations and professional relationships that support my career growth;” almost no benefits, few services and low pay. You are an employee without actually receiving state employee benefits;” “it would be better if I was considered a full employee and got full benefits;” “most of VCU doesn’t know I exist;” “postdocs, in particular, are treated like third-rate citizens. It’s as if we are a problem, rather than a resource.”