**Fall 2011 VCU Postdoctoral Survey Summary**

All VCU postdoctoral scholars (N=225) were sent an e-mail invitation to participate in our 3rd annual web-based survey to solicit feedback on issues related to being a postdoc at VCU. The original invitation and 2 follow-up e-mails were sent to encourage participation. A total of 108 responses were received, providing us with a 48% response rate, just slightly above last year’s response rate of 45%.

The survey included questions related to demographic information as well as questions asking how satisfied postdocs are on such topics as their scholarly productivity, opportunities for networking, career development activities, and services available at VCU. Below is a brief summary of the findings from the survey:

**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 slightly more likely to have been at VCU for less than a year, they were more likely to have held more than one postdoc position (31.5% of respondents having been in more than one position, compared to 17% of all postdocs), and less likely to be in the School of Medicine.

**Characteristics of Survey Respondents compared to all VCU postdoctoral scholars**

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|  | **Respondents**  **N = 108** | **All postdoctoral scholars**  **N = 225** |
| Citizenship | 50% U.S. citizen or permanent resident | 39% citizens or permanent resident |
| Gender | 54% female | 45% female |
| Age | <31 years = 29%  31–39 years = 63.5%  40+ years = 7.5% | NA |
| Marital Status | 73% married or w/partner | NA |
| Children <18 | 34% w/children | NA |
| Time as postdoc at VCU | <1 year = 36%  1-4 years = 63%  5+ years = 1% | <1 year = 39%  1-4 years = 58%  5+ years = 3% |
| Total # postdoc positions | 1 position = 68.5%  2 positions = 25%  3 or more = 6.5% | 1 position = 83%  2 positions = 14%  3 or more = 3% |
| School/College of Respondents | Medicine = 69%  H & S = 17.5%  Pharmacy = 4.8%  Engineering = 1%  Other = 7.7% | Medicine = 79%  H & S = 7.6%  Pharmacy = 6.8%  Engineering = 3.8%  Other = 2.5% |

**Career aspirations**: 56% of the respondents indicated that their main career goal was to be a tenure-track faculty member (36%) or in some other type of academic position (20%). Another 16% were interested in working in industry, with the remaining respondents having main career goals in positions ranging from government (NIH, CDC, etc.) to science writing. Over 64% are either currently looking for their next position or plan to actively start seeking their next position within 12 months.

**Career preparation**: Almost 28% of all respondents stated they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their publication record, and 48% felt they had not presented their research at conferences often enough. Despite this level of dissatisfaction with opportunities for dissemination, most felt their research training and experience was good (51%) or excellent (25%); less than 4% (4 respondents) perceived this training to be poor or very poor. Most postdocs also rated the mentoring they are receiving as good (40%) or excellent (33%), with just over 8% indicating it 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. As can be seen below, most are satisfied and find the mentor helpful, however, there are a significant minority who do not find their mentor helpful in planning their next career move. When asked how often they meet with their mentor to discuss work and career, 14% indicated that they only met once or twice a year with one respondent indicating that he/she had never met with their mentor, whereas almost 18% meet daily and 48% meet weekly.

We asked respondents if they had developed a written career plan for themselves and if they had shared that plan with their mentors. Only 15% of the respondents indicated they had completed a career plan, which is significantly less than the 30% of last year’s respondents who indicated they had completed a career plan. This is particularly surprising given that the majority of postdocs had been in their position for more than one year. Compared to last year, a smaller percentage of postdocs responded that their mentors were helpful in career planning. A few postdocs noted that they would like to have a workshop on creating a career plan. There was also interest in learning more about careers outside a major research university. **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. The mean rating on the opportunities for social activities is the same as the rating for importance of these activities. There were a few comments about the need for more social activities and for reaching out to the Monroe Park campus postdocs.

**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. These responses will guide us in implementing programming for postdoctoral scholars in the coming year. While grant writing has consistently been the most important need expressed by respondents, other areas of career development, such as teaching and job interviewing skills, are also seen as very or critically important by the respondents.

**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 (36%), and thus have had limited experience with the service. Of particular note is that the level of satisfaction for health care coverage has decreased this year despite a change in health plans. In 2010, 61% rated health care coverage as good or excellent and 15% rated it as poor or very poor. This year those percentages were 46% for good or excellent and 24% for poor or very poor. Comments from postdocs continue to focus on the high cost of health care for families and co-pays. Some respondents noted that VCU does not have same level of coverage for postdocs as other institutions.

**Overall satisfaction with postdoctoral experience at VCU**: 71% of the respondents rated their experience at VCU as a postdoc as either satisfied (51%) of very satisfied (20%), whereas 5% were dissatisfied and 24% were neutral. When asked for additional comments, respondents noted such things as more focus on postdoc who are in areas other than biomedical, increased salary, improvement in the mentoring, and more opportunities for collaborations with other areas.