**Fall 2012 VCU Postdoctoral Survey Summary**

All VCU postdoctoral scholars (N=221) were sent an e-mail invitation to participate in our 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 107 responses were received, providing us with a 48% response rate, the same as last year.

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 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 have been in more than one position, compared to 21.7% of all postdocs),. A smaller percentage of the respondents were in the School of Medicine compared to the overall postdoc population.

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

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Respondents**  **N = 107** | **All postdoctoral scholars**  **N = 221** |
| Citizenship | 42.2% U.S. citizen or permanent resident | 33.9% citizens or permanent resident |
| Gender | 47.2% female | 42.5 % female |
| Age | <31 years = 24.1%  31–39 years = 56.7%  40+ years = 19.2% | NA |
| Marital Status | 63.5% married or w/partner | NA |
| Children <18 | 33.7% w/children | NA |
| Time as postdoc at VCU | <1 year = 39%  1-4 years = 58.1%  5+ years = 2.9% | <1 year = 31.2%  1-4 years = 66.5%  5+ years = 2.2% |
| Total # postdoc positions | 1 position = 68.6%  2 positions = 22.9%  3 or more = 8.6% | 1 position = 78.3%  2 positions = 16.7%  3 or more = 5% |
| School/College of Respondents | Medicine = 69.4%  H & S = 13.3%  Pharmacy = 10.2%  Engineering = 5.1%  Other = 2.0% | Medicine = 76.9%  H & S = 7.7%  Pharmacy = 7.7%  Engineering = 6.3%  Other = 1.4% |

**Career aspirations**: 48.6% of the respondents indicated that their main career goal was to be a tenure-track faculty member, with another 13.3% stating that some other type of academic position was their main career goal. 12.4% were interested in working in industry, 6.8% were interested in positions ranging from government (NIH, CDC, etc.) to science writing, and over 16% were not sure of their main career goal. 25% are actively looking for their next position, and over 41% plan to actively start seeking their next position within 12 months.

**Career preparation**: 20% of respondents stated they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their publication record, and over 51% 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 (44.1%) or excellent (24.5%); however, almost 9% perceived this training to be poor or very poor. Most postdocs also rated the mentoring they are receiving as good (43.6%) or excellent (23.8%), with 21.8% being neutral and 11% 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. 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, 22.4% responded that they meet daily and 57.1% responded that they 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. Just over 18% of the respondents indicated they had completed a career plan. Of those who completed a plan, over a quarter of them had not shared that plan with their mentor. Compared to the 2011 respondents, a larger percentage of the 2012 postdoc respondents felt that their mentors were helpful in career planning (47% in 2011 compared to 63% in 2012 who indicated their mentor was helpful or very helpful). **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. There were a few comments about the need for more social activities for those new to the area, whereas some noted they didn’t have time for social activities.

**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 (39%), 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 2011, 46% rated health care coverage as good or excellent and 24% rated it as poor or very poor. This year those percentages were 43% for good or excellent and 28% for poor or very poor. Comments from postdocs continue to focus on the high cost of health care for families and co-pays.

**Overall satisfaction with postdoctoral experience at VCU**: 67% of the respondents rated their experience at VCU as a postdoc as either satisfied (50%) of very satisfied (17%), whereas 7% were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied, and 26% were neutral. When asked for additional comments, respondents noted such things as feeling like “cheap labor,” wanting a payscale more in line with NIH standards, improvement in the mentoring, and funding opportunities for postdocs.