**Fall 2013 VCU Postdoctoral Survey Summary**

All VCU postdoctoral scholars (N=227) 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 133 responses were received, providing us with a 59% response rate, more than 10 percentage points higher than any previous 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 = 133** | **All postdoctoral scholars**  **N = 227** |
| Citizenship | 47% citizens or permanent resident | 32% citizens or permanent resident |
| Gender | 49.2% female | 42% female |
| Age | <31 years = 23.7%  31–39 years = 59.6%  40+ years = 16.8% | NA |
| Marital Status | 61.1% married or w/partner | NA |
| Children <18 | 38% w/children | NA |
| Time as postdoc at VCU | <1 year = 39%  1-4 years = 55%  5+ years = 6% | <1 year = 30%  1-4 years = 63%  5+ years = 7% |
| Total # postdoc positions | 1 position = 69%  2 positions = 26%  3 or more = 5% | 1 position = 73%  2 positions = 19%  3 or more = 3% |
| School/College of Respondents | Medicine = 66%  H & S = 11%  Pharmacy = 11%  Engineering = 8%  Other = 4% | Medicine = 74%  H & S = 7%  Pharmacy = 8%  Engineering = 9%  Other = 2% |

**Career aspirations**: 45.4% of the respondents indicated that their main career goal was to be a tenure-track faculty member, with another 18.5% stating that some other type of academic position was their main career goal. 13.8% were interested in working in industry, 9.3% were interested in positions ranging from government (NIH, CDC, etc.) to science writing, and over 9% were not sure of their main career goal. 26% are actively looking for their next position, and over 42% plan to actively start seeking their next position within 12 months.

**Career preparation**: Over 33% of respondents stated they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their publication record, up from just 20% of respondents in the previous year. Over 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 (52.8%) or excellent (22.8%), with only 5.5% (N=7), responding that their training was poor. Most postdocs also rated the mentoring they are receiving as good (41.7%) or excellent (30.7%), with 18.1% being neutral and 9.4% 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, 14.5% responded that they meet daily and 61.3% 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 22% of the respondents indicated they had completed a career plan, this is slightly up from the 18% of respondents in last year’s survey who indicated they had a career plan. However, of those who completed a plan, almost a quarter of them had not shared that plan with their mentor. Most postdocs perceived their mentors to be helpful or extremely helpful (58%), or at least be willing to help in their career planning (32%). **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 25%) of the respondents rated the quality of their networking opportunities 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. 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, job interviewing skills has increased in importance among respondents over the years. In this year’s survey, over 85% of all respondents indicated that job interviewing skills were important or critical to them.

**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. In general, postdoctoral scholars are satisfied with the services available to them at VCU. Healthcare coverage continues to be one area of concern, particularly as it relates to cost and family coverage.

**Overall satisfaction with postdoctoral experience at VCU**: Almost 70% of the respondents rated their experience at VCU as a postdoc as either satisfied (57.7%) or very satisfied (12.2%), whereas 8.1% were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied, and 22% were neutral. When asked for additional comments to explain their level of dissatisfaction, respondents noted such things “postdocs are not considered students, staff, or faculty and this hinders our opportunities and well-being at the University;” “considered as ‘temporary employees’ is an insult;” and, “it is not fair to deny us the benefits that the rest of the staff receives.”