



About the National Postdoctoral Association (NPA)

www.nationalpostdoc.org

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Purpose

- The **National Postdoctoral Association (NPA)** is a 501(c)3 nonprofit, professional association headquartered in Washington, D.C.
- **The NPA seeks:**
 - To provide a unique, national voice for postdoctoral scholars (postdocs)
 - To facilitate positive change for postdocs
 - To advance the research enterprise in the United States.

Membership

- The NPA serves **the postdoctoral community**, including some **1,500 individual members**, and more than **180 institutional members** and the 40,000-plus postdoctoral scholars at these institutions.

Quick Facts about Postdoctoral Scholars (based on available data)

- A **postdoctoral scholar (“postdoc”)** is an individual holding a doctoral degree who is engaged in a temporary period of mentored research and/or scholarly training for the purpose of acquiring the professional skills needed to pursue a career path of his or her choosing.
- According to the *Science and Engineering Indicators 2008*: “Recent S&E doctorate holders who entered academic employment at research universities were more likely to be in postdoc than in faculty positions.”¹
- Traditionally, institutions have not kept records of postdoctoral scholars (although more and more institutions are doing so today); as a result, it is not clear how many postdoctoral scholars are in the United States—but the National Science Foundation (NSF) has estimated that there are from 43,000 to 89,000 postdocs in the United States².
 - The NSF emphasizes that these numbers are estimates, because its surveys focus mainly on postdoctoral scholars who have earned their Ph.D. in the United States and thus do not include representation of international postdoctoral scholars who did not complete their degree in the United States.
- The majority of postdoctoral scholars (estimated at 60 percent today³) are “international postdocs,”⁴ here on temporary visas.
- The number of science and engineering postdocs with temporary visas at U.S. universities has tripled in the past 20 years, from 8,900 in 1985 to 27,000 in 2005⁵.

¹ National Science Foundation Division of Science Resource Statistics. (January 2008). *Science and engineering indicators 2008*. Arlington, VA: National Science Board.

² National Science Foundation Division of Science Resource Statistics. (January 2010). *Science and engineering indicators 2010*. Arlington, VA: National Science Board..

³ Ibid.

⁴ Davis, G. 2005. Doctors without orders. *American Scientist* 93 (3, supplement). p. 14.
<http://postdoc.sigmaxi.org/results/>

⁵ National Science Foundation Division of Science Resource Statistics. (January 2008). *Science and engineering indicators 2008*. Arlington, VA: National Science Board.

- In spite of holding a Ph.D., the median salary of postdoctoral scholars is \$38,000 a year—far below the median wage of individuals who hold bachelor’s degrees⁶.
- The average postdoctoral scholar puts in significant “overtime,” working 51 hours a week, although they are not paid for overtime⁷.
- The average postdoctoral scholar, or “postdoc,” is in his/her early thirties and married⁸.
- There is a good chance that this scholar has at least one child, although at least one survey indicates that many delay having children because of the cost⁹.
- While the majority of postdoctoral scholars are in the biomedical fields, these scholars are also found in the social sciences, mathematical and computer sciences, engineering, and the arts and humanities¹⁰
- Where do scholars go after the postdoc? Forty-one percent find careers in business/industry; 9 percent in government; and 49 percent in education (includes all positions in education, administrative, tenure-track, and other)¹¹.

Highlights of NPA’s Efforts

The postdoctoral experience has gained new visibility on the national level, with the NPA playing a major role in elevating that awareness. Since 2003, the NPA staff, Board of Directors, and members have represented the postdoctoral community at nearly 300 national and regional meetings and conferences. *Through Congressional briefings, white papers, and communication with representatives of Federal agencies and national organizations, the NPA has played a significant role in the following:*

- The adoption of definitions of “postdoctoral scholars” by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the National Science Foundation (NSF).
- The establishment of the NIH Pathways to Independence award to help postdocs successfully transition to tenure-track faculty positions.

The research portion of the grant will cover full overhead costs, which can be as high as 50%. That feature should give universities a strong incentive to create positions for these investigators, Zerhouni says. "This is going to make it a lot easier for postdocs to get a faculty position because they're bringing so much money with them," adds Alyson Reed, executive director of the National Postdoctoral Association, which had also recommended the award's creation. -- Science 3 February 2006: Vol. 311. no. 5761, p. 593

- The Congressional requirement (America COMPETES Act) that NIH expand its data collection efforts regarding postdocs supported on research grants
- The Congressional requirement (America COMPETES Act) that NSF require mentoring plans in all research grant applications that seek funding for a postdoctoral scholar position.
- The establishment of several Postdoctoral Offices (PDOs) and Associations (PDAs) at institutions across the country.

Additionally, the NPA has developed and collected resources for enhancing the postdoctoral experience and, thus, the U.S. research enterprise. The NPA has developed these resources to benefit NPA members, but their influence extends well beyond the association. Among these resources are:

- The NPA’s Annual Meeting, a venue for sharing of best practices
- Recommended practices for PDOs and PDAs
- The NPA Core Competencies
- Survival Guide for international postdoctoral scholars.

⁶ Davis, G. 2005. Doctors without orders. *American Scientist* 93 (3, supplement). <http://postdoc.sigmaxi.org/results/>

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Stanford University Postdoctoral Association. (2008). Postdoc Survey Result.

<http://www.stanford.edu/group/supd/survey/2008.shtml>

¹⁰ National Science Foundation Division of Science Resource Statistics. (January 2010). *Science and engineering indicators 2010*. Arlington, VA: National Science Board.

¹¹ National Science Foundation/Division of Science Resources Statistics, Survey of Doctorate Recipients: 2006.