

## Successful seminar series for international postdocs: the UCSD experience

Hady Felfly  
University of California San Diego

### Abstract:

International postdocs constitute a major portion of postdocs in the US. The postdocsoral association (PDA) at the University of California San Diego (UCSD), in collaboration with the International Students and Scholar's Office (ISSO), created a seminar series related to visas and immigration issues, which proved to be very helpful in allowing foreign postdocs to better plan their travels, visa applications, and green card applications.

Keywords: international postdocs, visa, immigration, seminar

Postdocs are a major block in the research field, especially the science and biomedical branches. Over the years, it has been clearly known through a variety of surveys, that over 60% of postdocs are international. These postdocs have some major issues to worry about: not only they have to work on their respective projects and whatever is associated with their training, but they have to keep a legal immigration status. That includes renewing their visas on time, changing their visa status as needed, and applying for permanent residence in the United States. In addition, there are a lot of regulations related to traveling abroad that all international fellows have to be aware of, as they are many steps they have to do prior to their trip, and before returning to the US, steps that if not properly performed, can cost the postdocs their presence in the US, and thus, their career. There is a substantial amount of work needed for collecting various requirements and documents, staying up-to-date in the rapidly changing immigration laws and deadlines, and being aware of the regulations that are specific for certain countries. The work load related to postdoc training and the amount of time needed leaves little time for them to stay updated about the various laws and keeps them unaware of multiple regulations.

The Postdoc Association (PDA) at the University of California San Diego (UCSD) has been fully aware of that situation, and after collecting enough questions and inquiries from postdocs on campus, contacted the International Student's and Scholar's Office (ISSO) on campus late 2008, and suggested the ISSO provides postdocs on campus with a seminar related to a variety of issues, including visa applications and renewal, green card application, travel, and other topics. The ISSO took the request very seriously and prepared a major seminar that had high attendance among international postdocs. The whole team of International Scholar's Advisors were in the seminar, and each provided information related to a particular aspect of the immigration process. The seminar was followed by a series of questions that lasted close to an hour. Afterwards, the PDA conducted a survey among the attendees to get their feed-back and to know what other topics might be of interest, and relayed the results to the ISSO.

Through the survey, the PDA found that postdocs very much liked the seminar and wanted more seminars of that kind, with updates and emphasis of green card applications and travel abroad. Since the postdoc training has a high turnover, with many postdocs joining every month, the ISSO decided to provide targeted seminars roughly every 3-4 months, and the topics

discussed be based on the feed-back obtained from postdocs. Since then, this has become a seminar series for international postdocs with attendance sometimes of over 100 people, with many professors also attending to have a better understanding of the needs of postdocs.

This seminar series has proven very helpful for postdocs at UCSD, as they acquired more and more experience in handling their visa status. They also learned about the requirements for green card application and how to adjust their training to collect the requirements through the postdoc position. This seminar series can be used as a model for other institutions to follow, for better assisting international postdocs.