

Ayanna Augustus, PhD, Project Manager; Office of Drug Evaluation II, Center for Drug Evaluation and Research (CDER), US Food and Drug Administration (FDA)

Tenure at Jefferson: Dr. Augustus did her postdoctoral fellowship in the laboratory of Dr. Michael Lisanti in the Department of Cancer Biology.

Interviewer – How did you enjoy your tenure at Jefferson?

Dr. Augustus – I enjoyed my tenure at Jefferson, especially activities I participated in outside the lab, e.g. networking with other postdocs. I worked with Jefferson Postdoctoral Association (JPA) and during my tenure I liked attending “Career Seminars” and coordinating the Technical Skills seminar series as well as meeting with the presenters and discussing their careers.

Interviewer – When did you decide to leave academia for Government?

Dr. Augustus – I realized early on as a graduate student that a career in academia was not for me. I started exploring my career options as a graduate student and focused my career goals even more about one year and a half before obtaining my current position with the federal government.

Interviewer – What were your job search strategies?

Dr. Augustus – Networking! Networking! Networking!

Working with the JPA as the VP for Career Development put me in contact with individuals with a Ph.D., who were pursuing careers outside of the traditional research careers in academia. I attended as many postdoctoral research symposia, career fairs and networking events as possible. I especially enjoyed participating in the Philadelphia Regional Postdoctoral Symposium held at UPenn’s Museum of Anthropology and Archaeology in 2006, during my first year as a postdoc at TJU.

Interviewer – What was the application and interview process like for a government position?

Dr. Augustus – Hell!!! Applying for a job in the federal government is a long, arduous task. It took me over a year to obtain my current position. It was a laborious task that required a lot of tenacity but was well worth the time and energy.

Interviewer – How did your postdoc experience or activities at TJU prepare you to attain your current position?

Dr. Augustus – In addition to honing my communication skills as an officer with the JPA, I developed skills that most postdocs do while doing research. These included writing grants or research proposals, presenting my research to my lab and at research symposia as well as managing multiple research projects, and establishing collaborations with researchers at other institutions. These all helped me develop the skills I utilize daily as a project manager to coordinate the review process for investigational and new drug applications.

Interviewer – Can you describe how your present job is different from academia?

Dr. Augustus – As a project manager in the Office of Drug Evaluation II within the Center for Drug Evaluation and Research (CDER) at the FDA, I no longer conduct bench research but help manage the review process for investigational and new drug applications. I also act as the liaison between the federal government and industry. One of my primary job responsibilities is to know, understand and effectively communicate the regulations that govern drug development.

Interviewer – What are the best and worst aspects of your current job?

Dr. Augustus – Best Part: I have a life now. I work eight or nine hours a day. I enjoy the team-based approach that is fostered within the federal government which was not always possible or as enjoyable in academia.

Worst Part: The only down side to my job is that the overall process for doing business within the federal government can be slow, but for the most part I enjoy my job. Each day I learn something new.

Interviewer – If there is anything you would like to have done or would like to do differently about your career path, what would it be?

Dr. Augustus – Nothing! I would still have obtained my PhD and spent several years as a postdoc because the experiences helped me hone the management skills I use daily. Conducting independent research, developing time management skills, and networking with other scientists as a postdoc were invaluable experiences that helped me reach one of my career goals. The only thing I would have done differently was to start networking sooner ... much sooner.

Interviewer – Do you miss research and your bench work?

Dr. Augustus – Yes sometimes ... but those moments are few and far between. 😊

Interviewer – If there was one major piece of advice for postdocs here at Jefferson, what would it be?

Dr. Augustus – Network! Network! Network! You'll never know what opportunities are available to you unless you get out of the lab.