

JEFFPOST

Empowering Postdoctoral Careers

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Beyond the Bench: Celebrating Our Postdoc Community



Thank you for joining us throughout the year!

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Letter From the Board



*Backrow, from left: Mandeep Kaur, Zinah Bairmani, Lisa Kozlowski, Adrian Luna, Ranakul Islam, Rupesh Chikara
Front row, from left: Akansha Sharma, Sabine Ben Hamed, Anju Maharjan, Dawn Berkbigler*

The end of the JPA Board term is upon us, and we wanted to take a moment to share a message with the postdoctoral community. Most importantly, we want to thank you for your support throughout this past year.

This year was both exciting and challenging for our board. Many of us stepped into our roles for the first time. While there was certainly a learning curve, the experience proved to be rewarding. Serving on the JPA Board pushed us beyond our comfort zones and allowed us to develop skills that are often very different from those we build at the bench. From organizing events and coordinating logistics to working collaboratively as a larger team, we grew not only as researchers, but also as leaders and community members.

What we accomplished would not have been possible without the enthusiasm and participation of our fellow postdocs. Thank you for attending our events, sharing ideas, volunteering your time, and helping us build a stronger postdoctoral community at Jefferson.

Despite being new to many aspects of these roles and navigating the inevitable challenges along the way, we were proud to coordinate 18 events throughout the year. We introduced several new events, including our group hiking event, and what we consider one of the highlights of the year, the Inter-institutional Postdoc Social, which brought together approximately 200 postdocs across Philadelphia to connect, network, and build community beyond our own institution.

Looking back, we are proud of what this community accomplished together. More than anything, we hope this year helped strengthen the sense of connection, support, and belonging among postdocs across campuses.

Sincerely,

JPA Executive Board 2025-2026

Postdoc Perspectives: Lessons from the Journey

We asked senior postdocs to share advice and lessons learned from their time at Jefferson that may benefit other postdocs during their training experience. In the first section of Postdoc Perspectives, we focused on the importance of networking, building professional relationships, and taking advantage of opportunities for career development. The following section highlights their experiences and practical guidance for current and incoming postdocs at Jefferson.

Networking and its Importance



*Melissa Molho, Ph.D.
Microbiology and Immunology Department*

Q: Why is networking important for postdocs and early-career scientist?

Networking is important for building relationships, and it has many advantages for your professional career. It can help you to find a professional community, connect with people from different careers and backgrounds, learn about opportunities, and even make new friends.

Most importantly, data shows that referrals are one of the best ways to get a job. People hire people, and they usually hire people they know and trust. [It is estimated that ~ 80% of all jobs are filled by networking.](#) So building connections with intention is the best way to find and be considered for opportunities. Remember that having a supportive network goes a long way and is important at every step of your professional career.

Q: How do you approach networking in a way that feels genuine rather than transactional?

Approach people with curiosity and intention rather than with desperation. Ask questions and be a good listener during conversations, be curious about other people's professional paths and careers. Be authentic, share common interests, and make intentional connections. For example, if you both went to the same school, are from the same country, or enjoy the same type of food, you already have a common topic of conversation. Finish every conversation with a positive note and a future connection. Ask them for their LinkedIn and, if needed, request a follow-up conversation. [Finally, after every interaction, be grateful and appreciative of other people's time. Gratitude strengthens relationships.](#)

Q: What are some simple ways postdocs can start building their professional network?

[Building relationships and trust takes time, so having informational meetings, attending in-person networking events, and volunteering with professional groups are good ways to start gaining visibility and building connections.](#) LinkedIn is also a great platform for building a network and learning about opportunities and events. Connect with people you already know, like colleagues, past classmates and teachers, and send connection requests with a note to people you are interested in following. In addition to making new connections, it is also important to maintain your connections and be engaged. My general recommendations are:

- Make 15 minutes of your time every day to go through LinkedIn and give likes and positive comments to the people in your network.
- Attend at least one networking activity per month to connect with people from other fields and diverse careers.
- Be intentional with your time and invest it in people who are also genuine and considerate.

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Networking and its Importance (Continued)

Q: At what point did you realize networking was an important part of scientific career development?

My perspective completely shifted during my Ph.D. at the Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology in India and my postdoctoral fellowship at Thomas Jefferson University. Moving between international conferences and leading the first inter-institutional social made me realize that ground-breaking science can't happen alone. It hit me intensely that thriving as an immunologist requires a much broader toolkit than just executing flawless bench experiments. Success takes communication and real relationship-building. Today, I view networking on two essential levels: connecting with peers to crowdsource everyday technical troubleshooting and engaging with industry leaders to translate academic research into real-world vaccine and antibody therapeutics. **Ultimately, scientific capability gets you into the lab, but human connections bridge the gap to clinical applications.**



*Akansha Sharma, Ph.D.
Microbiology and Immunology Department*

Q: What are some simple ways postdocs can start building their professional network?

For postdocs, building a professional network doesn't have to be overwhelming. It starts with small, intentional steps that integrate into your current routine. A great gateway is leaning into professional organizations like [Women in Bio \(WIB\)](#). My time with WIB has given me a relaxed space to meet and greet industry professionals from diverse biopharmaceutical sectors. **Also, structured mentorship programs like [Nucleate Philadelphia](#) or [WIB MAPS mentoring circle](#) program are another goldmine.** They pair you with industry veterans who actively help refine your profile and teach you how to navigate the career transition. Closer to home, you can practice low-pressure networking by attending campus postdoc social events or simply sending brief LinkedIn notes to alumni for a quick, 15-minute informational interview.

What advice would you give to someone who feels uncomfortable networking?

Honestly, walking into a room full of strangers can feel incredibly awkward, exhausting, and completely out of your comfort zone when you are used to the quiet focus of the lab environment. **My biggest advice is simply to show up.** Networking is a muscle built through exposure, not an innate talent. You don't need a flawless elevator pitch on day one. Just step into the room, take the pressure off yourself by listening instead of presenting, and ask people about their own unique professional journeys. Set a tiny goal to have a genuine chat with just two or three people. By pushing past that initial friction, you will quickly find your voice.

Postdoc Perspectives: Lessons from the Journey

In the second section of Postdoc Perspectives, we focused on how international postdocs navigate visa transitions and the challenges they face. The interviewees shared personal stories and insights they gained while navigating the transition out of J-1 visas, particularly as international scholars.

Navigating Visa Transitions

Q: You recently transitioned from F1 status to permanent residency. What was that experience like, and what did you learn from the process?

I completed my Ph.D. on F-1 status and later transitioned to F-1 OPT to continue my postdoctoral training while my permanent residency application was underway. My EB-2 NIW I-140 was approved in early 2024, but visa backlogs delayed my adjustment of status application until 2025. During that period, I continued working under OPT and STEM OPT, though processing delays temporarily interrupted my ability to work. My employer also initiated an H-1B application, but my adjustment of status was approved before that process was completed. **Overall, this process taught me the importance of starting early, maintaining legal status, keeping strong documentation, and communicating closely with my employer and immigration advisors. I would also recommend that Ph.D. students or recent graduates consult an immigration law firm and [Jefferson's Office of International Services](#) early to evaluate possible permanent residency options.**



*Ranakul Islam, Ph.D.
Medical Oncology Department*

Q: What challenges or unexpected aspects of the transition stood out to you?

One of the biggest challenges was the delay in my STEM OPT extension approval. Because it was not approved in time, I had to stop working temporarily to remain compliant. During that period, my adjustment of status was approved, and I transitioned from F-1 OPT to permanent resident status. Another unexpected challenge was managing the timing of my immigration status, work authorization, and permanent residency. Although my I-140 was approved early, I could not immediately file for adjustment of status because the EB-2 category was backlogged at that time. This experience taught me that immigration timelines can be unpredictable, even when you plan carefully. **The most important lessons were to start early, keep strong documentation, communicate with my employer and immigration advisors, and always prioritize maintaining legal status.**

Q: Looking back, is there anything you wish you had known earlier in the process?

Looking back, **I wish I had known that I could explore permanent residency options much earlier**, even after completing my Master of Science at Texas Tech University. If I had consulted an immigration attorney and applied for the I-140 earlier, it could have saved a lot of time, money, and stress. I also wish I had understood how important timing is, especially with EB-2 backlogs and delays in OPT/STEM OPT work authorization. This experience taught me to plan early, keep documents organized, and always prioritize maintaining legal status throughout the process. Since I have gone through different immigration stages, including F-1, F-1 OPT, STEM OPT, H-1B processing, and permanent residency, I would be happy to share my experience with anyone who has questions or needs guidance.

Postdoc Perspectives: Lessons from the Journey

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Navigating Visa Transitions (Continued)



*Manjuprasanna V. Nagaraju, Ph.D.
Medicine Department, Hematology Division*

Q: Can you walk us through the general process at Jefferson for transitioning from J-1 to H1-B?

The transition from a J-1 visa to an H-1B visa is a critical phase in a postdoc's career journey. This process is handled [by Jefferson's Office of International Services](#), which typically begins the H-1B process at least 6 months before the individual's J-1 end date, in coordination with an immigration attorney hired by the institution. [Although exact timelines may vary depending on the department and funding source, the process generally starts after the PI or department administrator confirms their willingness to sponsor the postdoc for H-1B status.](#)

Q: When should postdocs begin thinking about or preparing for this transition?

I suggest that it is important to start thinking about the H-1B process as early as a postdoc's entry into their 5th year, even though the actual filing process usually begins at least 6 months in advance. [It is very important for postdocs to discuss this early with their Principal Investigator \(PI\) to ensure that the lab is willing to sponsor the H-1B visa. If the lab is not willing to provide sponsorship, postdocs will have enough time to explore alternative options, especially since many universities are becoming reluctant to hire candidates who require a new H-1B sponsorship.](#) If the lab agrees to sponsor the H-1B, postdocs should begin collecting all required documents early to ensure a smooth, timely H-1B filing process.

Q: Who typically sponsors the H-1B process, and what factors are considered before the sponsorship is approved?

The employer, specifically the postdoc's PI and department, is the sponsor for the H-1B process, while the institution's immigration office and attorneys handle the legal filing procedures. Before approving H-1B sponsorship, several factors are usually considered, including:

- Availability of funding to support the position and associated legal fees.
- Long-term need for the employee's role in the lab or department.
- Employee's performance and contribution to the research program.
- Duration of the remaining project or grant support.
- Compliance with institutional and immigration policies.
- Whether the position qualifies for H-1B sponsorship requirements, such as requiring specialized knowledge and at least a bachelor's degree or higher in a relevant field.

[In most cases, the PI and department leadership discuss these factors before making a final decision regarding sponsorship.](#)

Valuable Resources to Know About

- Paycheck-related issues, contact Linda Day: linda.day@jefferson.edu
- Core Facilities: [Service Centers website](#)
- Free Licenses
 - Research Resources Page, <https://research.jefferson.edu/resources.html>
 - Data-Driven Platforms, <https://research.jefferson.edu/resources/data-driven-platforms.html>
- Software available for Jefferson employees, including Grammarly, Prism, BioRender, and more: <https://library.jefferson.edu/tech/software/index.cfm?keywords>
- Tuition Benefit for JCLS courses: <https://www.jefferson.edu/university/life-sciences/student-resources/course-list.html> | Dr. Carol Beck: Carol.Beck@jefferson.edu
- Free writing consultation and editing services, [Professional Writing & Communication \(OPWPC\)](#)
- Follow us on Instagram, [Jefferson Postdoctoral Association](#)

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