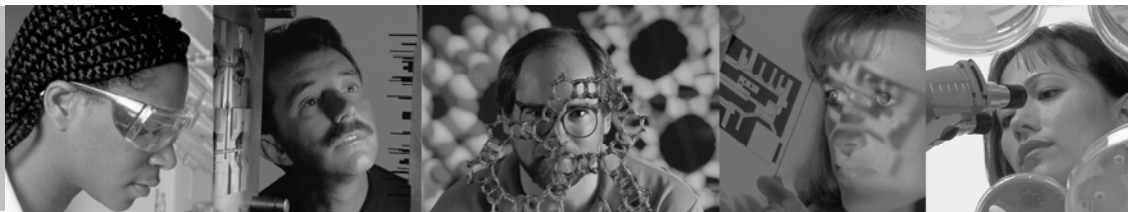


SIGMA XI POSTDOC SURVEY



SIGMA XI POSTDOC SURVEY: HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE 2003/2004 PILOT STUDY

Overview of Survey Goals

The Sigma Xi Postdoc Survey, funded by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, is designed to improve the training and research environments for postdoctoral researchers by providing a better understanding of their experiences. Survey results will enable institutions to benchmark their policies and practices against those at peer institutions.

Sigma Xi conducted a pilot survey at five institutions from December 2003 to January 2004. The survey was conducted online. Pilot institutions identified their postdocs based on institutional mailing lists and human resources databases. An initial survey invitation was e-mailed to postdocs at participating institutions, followed by a series of reminders to non-respondents. Response rates at participating institutions were approximately 40%. The information here highlights preliminary findings from the pilot survey.

Sigma Xi will be conducting the full survey at roughly 40 campuses starting in May 2004. The instrument and processes have been refined based on the pilot experience. Data from the full survey is scheduled for release in Fall 2004.

Pilot Survey Highlights

Note that these observations are preliminary!

Definition of Postdoc: Common postdoc definitions appear to need refinement

- About half of the respondents do not see their positions as being “primarily for the purpose of training in research or scholarship”
- About half of the respondents report that they do not “work under the supervision of a senior scholar or department”

Overall Satisfaction: A majority of respondents are satisfied with their postdoc experiences.

- Most respondents indicate that their current positions are preparing them to be independent researchers.
- A majority of respondents give their postdoc advisors overall high marks.
- There appear to be a number areas for improvement, and these are consistent regardless of institution type, gender or citizenship.
 - Salary & benefits
 - Formal training opportunities for ‘soft skills’ (communication, management, teaching, etc.)
 - Structure in the postdoc/employer relationship (employment contracts, reviews, etc.)

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- Respondents provided numerous constructive suggestions for ways to improve their experiences.

Institutional Differences: There is variation in respondents' working conditions and resources at different institutions BUT consistency in respondents' goals, needs and desires.

- Final survey results should be very useful in helping institutions prioritize postdoc-related initiatives.
- It will be interesting to see in the full survey the extent to which these differences generalize (e.g. are there consistent differences between government and academic institutions?, etc)

Resources for Postdocs: A number of respondents are either unaware of or do not use existing resources.

- A clear majority of respondents are familiar with institutional postdoc associations and/or offices.
- About half indicate having used postdoc associations and/or offices as resources.

Demographic Comparisons:

- Women and men appear to have similar experiences.
- Non-US citizens appear to be less positive about their experiences (however, we still need to control for potentially confounding factors).
- One timely issue: non-citizens report considerable impact from security regulations on their research and ability to travel.

Full Survey

The full study survey data promise to reveal additional areas of possible improvement and offer insights about how to enhance the postdoc experience. The full study results are projected for release in Fall 2004.

Survey Partners

Sigma Xi's partners in shaping survey content, recruiting participating institutions, and disseminating survey results are the National Postdoctoral Association, the Postdoc Network at *Science's Next Wave*, the Science and Engineering Workforce Project at the National Bureau of Economic Research, and Sigma Xi Chapters.

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