ICBP Junior Investigator Meeting
October 17-18, 2007
Doubletree Hotel, Bethesda, MD

Notes from Panel Discussion with Keynote Speakers and the NCI Speakers

Panel members:
Azhar Aziz (Case)
Margaret Briehl (Univ. of Arizona)
Keith Elliston (Genstruct)
Sonia Jakowlew (NCI)
Doug Lauffenburger (MIT)
Ken Loparo (Case)
Susan McCarthy (NCI)
Gerry Ostheimer (MIT)

DISCUSSION TOPICS

Assessing Expertise

1. Question: How do you assess expertise?
    - Answer from Keith: CV, background, and personal judgment. Best advice: find good references, interact with those in the field who can vouch for you and be prepared to tell someone about yourself.

Private Industry vs. Academia

2. Question: Do people go back from private industry to academia?
    - Answer from Doug: Yes. More cutting edge science is being done in the private industry and those leaving and coming to academia brings that science to the arena. We are interested in hiring folks that have industrial experience.
    - Answer from Keith: People do go back to academia. For instance, Pfizer layoffs have caused employees to transition to either other private industry jobs or take positions in academia.

Job Positions

3. Question: How do you know what positions are available and salaries at other academic institutions?
    - Answer from Margaret: There are various publications with this information as well as use your public library.
    - Answer from Ken: APA publishes this information based on the types of schools or institutions.
    - Answer from Doug: Salaries are pretty standardized depending on the institution. What resources do you need for success (important question for you to answer, first)? New faculty is a huge investment. Don't view this as

negotiations but a partnership. Advice: Establish what start up resources are necessary to get you started in your career. Be frank about what you need and why (salary, equipment, resources).

3.1 Question: What is important for getting a job?

- Answer from Keith: Networking, make presentations, soft skills are important

Disciplines

4. Question to Keith – How are new disciplines established?
    - Answer from Keith: Pioneers, starting something new is a difficult process. You have to take a chance and put everything on the line. It takes initiative to find funding. It takes a visionary or someone who is productive.
    - Answer from Doug: Very, very slow process and it ought to be. Universities do get into trouble when creating things too lightly, sometimes because of influences (money). When things work best is when there is a consensus. Pioneer ideas should occur through consensus. For instance, one example he spoke about took 10 years for MIT to establish.
    - Answer from Ken: Many departments at Case developed over time as well. They generated with the philosophy to be "collective" as a unit. He agrees with Doug, it's a slow process to sale a new discipline because of the hierarchical process.
    - Answer from Sonia: Write it up! There is money out there. If you can convince others that your research is necessary, funding is available. Advice: If you have preliminary data, start writing a grant; it's never too early.

Multidisciplinary Positions

5. Question: Collaboration is not unusual. How to expedite the cultural shift to multidisciplinary work?
    - Answer from Susan: NIH has multi-PI R01s. They will give you full credit as a PI.
    - Answer from Doug: Agreed with Susan's comment. The government is far ahead in seeing the needs of academia. He would like academia to catch up.

5.1 Question: What are the issues with "deep" expertise (being highly expert in two areas)?

- Answer from Doug: If the two areas are integrated, then it is one expertise. If the two areas are not integrated, there is not point on integrating. It just depends on what expertise is valued.
- Answers from Ken/Margaret: External letters of recommendations are helpful. How you present yourself to the department, your peers and colleagues was also mentioned.
- Answer from Keith: Finds it better to hire two experts than two multidisciplinary. External letters of recommendation are really important.

Obtaining your first job

6. How to go for the first job?

- Answer from Ken: Know what you need and your expectations; then you can begin to find the right job. Do your homework to find out what other universities are doing before applying. Recruiters are looking for those they think are going to be successful and not just you thinking you're going to be successful. Academics want you to be a success.
- Answer from Margaret: Bring along your success stories and convince the recruiter you will be a success. Get a faculty list and figure out who you can interact with.
- Answer from Susan: Gave story of her first job choices (job offers at Miami and Pitt). You should think about your comfort level and whether you are adventurous. Will you fit in?
- Answer from Keith: Be able to make a contribution. Know what you can contribute.
- Answer from Sonia: Keep in touch with those (your colleagues) that have already found jobs; get their advice and learn from their experiences.

Grants

7. How can a Postdoc get a grant?
    - Sonia: They must be affiliated with institutions that are interested. Seek out new investigators who can help you and provide advice. If you have an innovative, bright idea, get a collaborator. Reviewers recognize this if they feel the area needs to move forward.
    - Answer from Keith: From a private industry perspective, he has hired some scientists with great skills that have transitioned over because they haven't found their "niche" in academia. Not all have Ph.D.
    - Answer from Doug: Market driven. Universities are afraid of taking a chance. Study sections are conservative and will look for more experience.

Mentoring

8. A lot of senior staff doesn't have extra time to mentor or lack the skills. Any opinions on mentoring?
    - Answer from Sonia: Mold and tutor your mentor.
    - Answer from Susan: Sympathize with the Postdocs. One trait of a good mentor is that they will volunteer to do so.
    - Doug: A lot of senior staff don't have extra time to mentor or lack the skills. Any opinions on mentoring? – There will be values, measures, and metrics that each of us have. You have a choice between doing the job on your own standards or the ones around you. Understand this before seeking out mentors.

Postdoctoral Fellowships

9. Do you have to do a postdoc in this field?
    - Answer from Keith: the majority of hires has done 1-2 postdocs. Usually this is based on the individual – I've hired people without Ph.D.s in some cases.

Lessons Learned/Success Stories

- Ken: Don't oversell the field. Don't make promises you can't keep. (Ex. The field of Artificial Intelligence)
- Margaret: Tools and ways of thinking are important to proceed.
- Doug: Unless you're confident with the association of your expertise (ex. System biologist), then don't use it because people will look at it at face value. Be able to communicate and describe your own expertise; don't put a name on it. The opinion of the field transfers to you. The jury is out on "systems biology".

Last Remarks

- Doug: Admire Postdocs for coming and hopes it was helpful. Continue asking questions and email/contact him.
- Margaret: Offered a copy of her presentation. Contact her if you have any questions.
- Ken: Enjoyed the pleasure of being invited to present. Contact him.
- Keith: Ask if they are interested in academia or private industry. The World is an interesting place and so is the field. Challenge it and enjoy the experience. Contact him.
- Susan: Go to a lot of workshops, brainstorming sessions, think tanks and meetings. There is always something new to learn.
- Sonia: Exciting time to be a cancer researcher. Be proactive and find your passion. Contact her about grants and fellowships.

Recommendations:

1. 2nd Annual Post Doc Meeting
2. Presentations be available on website

Action Items

1. Betty will be sending attendees an evaluation form for their feedback on the Postdoc meeting.
2. Betty to request PowerPoint Presentation from speakers.
3. Betty to send thank you notes to the speakers.