

JET PROPULSION LABORATORY

INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

14 November 2006

TO: Science Division

FROM: Harold Yorke/Michael Gunson
Division Management

Subject: Division Postdoctoral Scholars

The Science Division has hosted many excellent postdoctoral scholars (postdocs) over the years who have had successful research careers either at JPL or elsewhere. This is not least due to the commitment and dedication of their advisors. To capture and build on these successes, and to provide guidance to new advisors and arriving postdocs, the following policy outlines objectives and guidance for a successful postdoctoral experience at JPL in the Science Division.

In addition to all applicable JPL institutional policies and procedures, the Science Division shall follow this policy with respect to Postdoctoral Scholars. The objectives of these policies are to:

- create a positive and nurturing environment for all postdoctoral scholars,
- ensure the postdoctoral scholars are successful in starting their career as independent researchers,
- empower every postdoctoral scholar to seek immediate advice and help for any problem,
- provide an open door policy to at all levels of line management within the Science Division, and
- ensure that the research leads to publications in the open literature.

Action required before and upon arrival

The Division is responsible for all logistical support and will make every effort to house each postdoctoral scholar who has an advisor from the Science Division. This requires early involvement of Division line management to ensure facilities are available.

- The Advisor shall notify the Group Supervisor of the expected arrival date at least 1-2 months in advance.
- The Group supervisor shall notify the Section Business Administration Manager (BAM) and Section management of the arrival date at least one month ahead of the first day at JPL.
- The Section BAM shall ensure that facilities and resources are available within 24 hours of the arrival (and badging) of the postdoctoral scholar.

- Desk to sit at, physical mailbox, telephone, JPL username, computer, and an e-mail account
- On the first day
 - Advisor to introduce to Group Supervisor (or Section Manager or Deputy as a “one-over”) for 10/15 minute welcome
 - Advisor should explain that he or she is always the first person the postdoc can contact for help. In the advisor’s absence, however, the postdoc is encouraged to contact the Group Supervisor and Section Management team for support
 - Advisor to introduce the Section or Group secretary as the point-of-contact for administrative help
 - Ensure they have a copy of Postdoc Handbook (available end of November 2006)
 - Advisor to provide name to the Section BAM for inclusion in division postdoc e-mail list and the option of being included on the Science Division external web-site (<http://science.jpl.nasa.gov/>)

Action within the first week

- Advisor to introduce the postdoctoral scholar to the Section Manager (and/or Deputy) and the Division management for 10/15 minutes

Annual evaluation, seminars and research update

While the postdoctoral scholar and the advisor will have established a research plan at the outset of the scholar’s time at JPL, it is conceivable that it might change with time to better suit the advisor’s objectives and the scholar’s specific interests and skills. In time, a postdoctoral scholar should be progressing toward an independent research program as a key to seeking a more permanent career position.

- Seminar Opportunity
 - Part of this development will be the opportunity to give a seminar at JPL each year that should include a description of a research plan for the coming year(s).
 - More frequent (than annual) formal or informal seminars by the postdoctoral scholar are encouraged
- Research Plan
 - The advisor and the scholar will form a research plan that leads to refereed publications and conference proceedings
 - Line management and an appropriate peer group should provide frank and honest evaluation to both the postdoctoral scholar and advisor on the research plan
 - After the first year, the research plan should be aligned with the science objectives established by the advisor, but the detailed

implementation should be the responsibility of the postdoctoral scholar

- The Group Supervisor and Section Management team are encouraged to periodically meet with the postdoctoral scholar for an informal update on progress and plans

Problem resolution

Problems affecting the postdoctoral scholar's research should be addressed promptly. Advisors solve many issues brought to them in a very timely fashion. In the rare cases that an issue involves a disagreement with the advisor, the postdoctoral scholars should be encouraged to seek help from the line management up to and including the Division management office for any issues of this nature.

Summary

In addition to postdocs being one of our most valuable assets for their contribution to research while at JPL, upon leaving JPL, they become JPL's ambassadors in the science community at large. By formalizing these practices of our current advisors into a Division-wide policy, we are confident that every postdoctoral scholar here in the Science Division will have a rewarding research experience.

CC: Office of the Chief Scientist
Education Affairs