

Postdoctoral Scholars Experience at UW-Madison Fall-2001

Given heightened national interest and our own concern for the postdoctoral scholar population, the Graduate School began last year to research issues related to the postdoctoral experience. UW-Madison has approximately 600 postdoctoral scholars in schools, colleges, centers and institutes throughout the University.

We held listening groups of postdoctoral scholars and principal investigators/faculty mentors last spring and conducted a survey of postdoctoral scholars late fall. From the listening groups we heard concerns regarding access to timely information regarding employment, recruitment, professional and career development, workplace protection, and leave issues. The postdoctoral survey was developed by the University of Wisconsin Survey Center. The response rate was nearly 81% - 80.7% . The Survey Center interviewed 461 postdoctoral scholars out of a total of 571 cases.

The preliminary results show:

- 1) Almost 90% of postdoctoral scholars reported that they are satisfied with their postdoctoral experience at UW thus far. Less than 10% reported being dissatisfied.
- 2) More than 90% of postdoctoral scholars said that they would take a postdoc position again if they had to do it all over again. And, among those who said they would, 91% said they would take a postdoc position at UW-Madison again.
- 3) Postdoctoral scholars are most satisfied with access to their supervisor (93%) but least satisfied with the amount they are paid (65%).
- 4) Postdoctoral scholars generally have little uncertainty about the conditions of their employment, except in the area of vacation time, sick leave and grievance procedures.
- 5) Postdoctoral scholars have the most interest in workshops or additional training on the process of finding a job and in writing grant proposals.
- 6) More than 80% agreed that their department or program provides a supportive environment for postdoctoral scholars in general as well as for women, international scholars and members of minority groups. However, only slightly over 60% of postdoctoral scholars agreed that the university does a good job of making them feel a part of the academic community.

UW-MADISON POSTDOCTORAL SCHOLAR SURVEY: SUMMARY OF RESULTS

James A. Sweet
Tak Yun Yu



University of Wisconsin Survey Center
1800 University Avenue, Room 102
University of Wisconsin
Madison, WI 53705

Telephone(608) 262-2182
Fax(608) 262-8432
sweet@ssc.wisc.edu
tyyu@ssc.wisc.edu

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INTRODUCTION

The University of Wisconsin Survey Center (UWSC) conducted the UW-Madison Postdoctoral Scholar Survey in 2001. A total of 461 postdoctoral scholars were interviewed by telephone. Postdoctoral scholars were asked questions regarding their experience as well as satisfaction with various aspects of their postdoctoral experience.

SURVEY PROCEDURES

The UWSC conducted the UW-Madison Postdoctoral Scholar Survey from August, 10 through October 5, 2001. A total of 461 interviews, averaging 23.2 minutes in length, were completed.

Postdoctoral scholars were called at their Madison area home or work phone number. An extensive effort was made to locate postdoctoral scholars who had moved. Calls were made at different times of day and days of week in order to maximize the probability of finding the postdoctoral scholars.

The response rate was 80.7%. It should be noted that we were sampling all UW-Madison postdoctoral scholars from the June 2001 payroll while interviews were conducted between August and October. Therefore, some postdoctoral scholars in the sample were no longer employed at the UW-Madison at the time of the interview.

RESPONSE RATE

A total of 571 cases were put into the field, and this resulted in:

461 **Completed Interviews**

110 **Non-Response**

34	<i>Refusals</i>
2	<i>Respondent too ill</i>
5	<i>Respondent language barrier</i>
16	<i>Respondent gone for duration</i>
13	<i>Respondent inaccessible</i>
16	<i>Traced, unable to locate respondent</i>
24	<i>Other non-contact</i>

The response rate was 80.7%. This was figured by dividing the total number of completed interviews by the total number of sampled respondents:

$$\begin{aligned}\text{Response Rate} &= \frac{\text{Completed Interviews}}{\text{Completed} + \text{Total Non-Response}} \\ &= \frac{461}{461 + 110} = \frac{461}{571} \\ &= 0.807\end{aligned}$$

**CHARACTERISTICS OF UW-MADISON
POSTDOCTORAL SCHOLARS**

GENDER

Male	67.7
Female	<u>32.3</u>
	100.0

MARITAL STATUS

Married	66.7
Not Married	<u>33.3</u>
	100.0

AGE

Under 30	12.7
30-39	76.8
40 and above	<u>10.5</u>
	100.0

DEPENDENT CHILDREN

Yes	60.9
No	<u>39.1</u>
	100.0

RACE/ETHNICITY

Domestic	
Black	0.9
Asian	1.5
Hispanic	1.1
Non-Hispanic White	42.1
Biracial-Multiracial	0.4
Other	0.7
Refused	0.9
Foreign*	<u>52.5</u>
	100.0

U.S. CITIZEN

Yes	47.5
No	<u>52.5</u>

HOURS WORKED PER WEEK

Less than 40	6.1
40 - 49	32.0
50 - 59	34.0
60 or more	<u>27.8</u>

*Non-US Citizen

**CHARACTERISTICS OF UW-MADISON
POSTDOCTORAL SCHOLARS
(CONTINUED)**

TYPE OF HIGHEST DEGREE		POSTDOC PRIOR TO UW	
PH.D.	94.1	Yes	22.3
M.D.	2.8	No	<u>77.7</u>
Other	<u>3.0</u>		100.0
	100.0		
UNIVERSITY		CURRENT TITLE	
		Research Associate	61.8
UW-Madison	25.2	Postdoc Fellow	21.9
Other U.S. institutions	37.3	Research Associate & Postdoc Fellow	2.6
Foreign Institutions	<u>37.5</u>	Other	8.9
	100.0	Don't Know	<u>4.8</u>
			100.0
HOW LONG BEEN A POSTDOC		MENTOR/SUPERVISOR	
Less than 1 year	21.5	Have a mentor/supervisor	88.1
1 - 2 years	45.7	Work as independent scholar	10.0
3 - 4 years	22.4	Don't Know	1.7
5 years or more	<u>10.3</u>	Refused	<u>0.2</u>
	100.0		100.0
CONTINUOUS AT UW		GENDER of MENTOR	
Yes	91.1	Male	86.7
No	<u>8.9</u>	Female	<u>13.3</u>
	100.0		100.0

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Overall Satisfaction

Extremely Satisfied	39.7
Somewhat Satisfied	49.1
Neither	1.5
Somewhat Dissatisfied	7.2
Extremely Dissatisfied	<u>2.4</u>
	100.0

- Almost 90% of postdoctoral scholars reported that they are satisfied with their postdoctoral experience at UW thus far. Less than 10% of postdoctoral scholars reported being dissatisfied.

Would Take Postdoc Again

Definitely Would	55.8
Probably Would	36.4
Probably Would Not	6.1
Definitely Would Not	<u>1.7</u>
	100.0

Would Take Postdoc Position At UW-Madison Again

Definitely Would	45.4
Probably Would	45.9
Probably Would Not	5.5
Definitely Would Not	3.1
	100.0

- Over 90% of postdocs said that they would take a postdoc position again if they had to do it all over again. And among those who said they would, 91% said they would take a postdoc position at UW-Madison again.

Overall Satisfaction by Characteristics

	Extremely Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Neither	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Extremely Dissatisfied	Total
Male	41.2	48.6	1.6	6.4	2.3	100.0
Female	36.7	50.3	1.4	8.8	2.7	100.0
US citizen	38.1	48.2	1.8	8.3	3.7	100.0
Non-US citizen	41.3	50.0	1.3	6.3	1.3	100.0
Married	38.6	50.2	1.7	7.3	2.3	100.0
Not married	42.5	46.4	1.3	7.2	2.6	100.0
Have children	37.6	48.3	2.2	9.0	2.8	100.0
Do not have children	41.5	49.5	1.1	5.8	2.2	100.0
Have a mentor	41.0	47.9	1.0	7.4	2.7	100.0
Independent scholar	29.5	59.1	4.5	6.8	0.0	100.0
Mentor is male	42.3	47.2	0.9	6.8	2.8	100.0
Mentor is female	32.1	52.8	1.9	11.3	1.9	100.0

- International postdocs are slightly more likely to report being satisfied than domestic postdocs (91% vs. 86%).
- Postdocs who are married are less likely to report being extremely satisfied than postdocs who are not married (39% vs. 43%).
- Likewise, postdocs who have dependent children are less likely to report being satisfied than postdocs who do not have dependent children (86% vs. 91%).

Assessment of Specific Aspects of Postdoctoral Experience

	More	Less	About Right	Other Response	Total
Opportunity to...					
participate in professional meetings	40.5	0.4	58.0	1.1	100.0
teach	41.3	4.8	50.4	3.5	100.0
prepare grant proposals	53.0	2.2	43.3	1.5	100.0
supervise research staff members	36.4	4.4	58.6	0.7	100.0
supervise graduate students	32.2	4.6	62.3	0.9	100.0

- Over half of postdocs said their opportunity to do the above is about right, with the exception of preparing grant proposals, where 53% of postdocs said they would like to have more opportunity to do so.

	Extremely Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Neither	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Extremely Dissatisfied	Total
Opportunity to present at seminars in department	24.7	59.3	0.9	11.8	3.3	100.0
Opportunity to interact with scholars outside research group	27.3	42.9	0.4	22.2	7.1	100.0
Amount of evaluation received from mentor	44.2	37.5	1.0	13.6	3.7	100.0
Amount paid	15.3	49.7	2.0	24.6	8.5	100.0
Amount of vacation and sick leave available	34.5	43.2	1.8	11.7	8.8	100.0
Access to supervisor	66.7	26.4	0.5	5.2	1.2	100.0
Clarity of supervisor's expectations	44.9	38.0	2.0	10.6	4.4	100.0

- Postdoctoral scholars are most satisfied with access to their supervisor (93% satisfied and 6.4% dissatisfied) but least satisfied with the amount they are paid (65% satisfied and 33% dissatisfied).

Assessment of Specific Aspects of Postdoctoral Experience (Con't)

	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor	N/A	Total
Mentoring	37.4	27.8	22.2	7.4	5.2	0.0	100.0
Computing facilities	37.8	31.0	21.0	7.2	2.8	0.2	100.0
Library resources	47.5	30.2	18.0	3.0	1.1	0.2	100.0
Laboratories	29.0	31.8	21.4	7.8	1.7	8.3	100.0
Training received in professional ethics	9.6	23.5	32.7	12.6	9.6	11.9	100.0
Rapport between faculty and postdocs	16.9	30.3	33.0	12.8	7.0	0.0	100.0

- Training received in professional ethics and rapport between faculty and postdocs are rated the least favorably.

Grievance

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Better keep quiet when I have a disagreement with supervisor	7.8	19.9	1.0	33.5	37.8	100.0
I know what to do when I have a grievance with my supervisor	30.8	39.7	1.5	22.6	5.3	100.0

- Over 70% of postdocs disagreed that they should keep quiet when they have a disagreement with their supervisor and about the same percentage of postdocs agreed that they know what to do when there is a grievance with their supervisor.

Training Needs

	Extremely Interested	Somewhat Interested	Not Very Interested	Not Interested At All	Total
Workshops or additional training...					
writing grant proposals	47.4	38.9	10.4	3.3	100.0
publication process	36.1	38.5	19.3	6.1	100.0
process of finding a job	51.3	34.8	9.8	4.1	100.0
effective teaching methods	32.5	45.0	17.5	5.0	100.0
effective ways of resolving conflict	21.4	47.3	22.5	8.8	100.0
issues of professional ethics	23.7	49.8	21.9	4.6	100.0

- Postdocs have the most interest in workshops or additional training on the process of finding a job and in writing grant proposals.

Expectations or Uncertainty

	Yes	No	Total
Have you ever been unsure about...			
amount you would be paid	14.1	85.9	100.0
amount of vacation time available	49.9	50.1	100.0
amount of sick leave available	46.5	53.5	100.0
grievance procedures available	45.0	55.0	100.0
what your duties would be	14.3	85.7	100.0
when you would be notified about the renewal or non-renewal of your appointment	20.5	79.5	100.0

- Postdocs generally have little uncertainty about the conditions of their employment, except in the area of vacation time, sick leave and grievance procedures.

Role of Postdocs

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Postdoc positions keep down cost of research	15.1	32.2	0.7	30.4	21.7	100.0
New scholars need postdoc experience	48.1	29.6	0.4	15.7	6.1	100.0
Postdocs are often exploited by their supervisors	14.2	37.8	0.7	30.6	16.7	100.0
Accepted postdoc because could not find a job	4.6	13.7	0.4	19.3	62.0	100.0
Confident to move from postdoc into academic/research position	40.3	39.6	0.7	13.8	4.8	100.0
Ready to work as independent investigator	36.2	38.6	0.4	18.3	6.5	100.0
Mentor encourages me to grow and develop as a scholar and researcher	58.5	31.3	0.7	6.7	2.7	100.0
Feel appreciated by research group members	48.3	42.6	0.7	5.0	3.5	100.0
Would like to be more involved in governance of department	14.2	40.5	1.1	29.6	14.6	100.0
PI does not do his/her share but gets credit for everything	7.3	12.6	1.3	26.0	52.8	100.0
Concerned about health/safety hazards	12.0	21.3	0.9	22.6	43.3	100.0

Information

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Know where to get reliable info about conditions of employment	34.3	39.3	0.7	19.4	6.3	100.0
No one in department office knows about rules that apply to postdoc positions	8.2	25.2	0.7	37.2	28.8	100.0

- Almost three-quarters of postdocs agreed that they know where to get reliable information about conditions of their employment; however, about one-third of postdocs agreed that no one in their department’s office knows about the rules that apply to postdoctoral positions.

Climate

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree	N/A	Total
My department provides a pleasant work environment for postdocs	38.9	44.8	0.9	11.1	4.4	0.0	100.0
My program offers a supportive environment for...							
women	37.2	46.0	1.5	10.7	3.9	0.7	100.0
international scholars	45.4	42.4	0.7	7.3	2.8	1.6	100.0
members of minority groups	35.6	47.5	1.5	9.6	3.8	2.0	100.0
University does a good job of making postdocs feel a part of the academic community	19.2	42.3	0.9	27.3	10.4	0.0	100.0
Feel safe on campus in the evening	65.7	25.2	0.7	5.0	0.9	2.6	100.0

- Over 80% of postdocs agreed that their department or program provides a supportive environment for postdocs in general as well as for women, international scholars and members of minority groups. However, only slightly over 60% of postdocs agreed that the university does a good job of making postdocs feel a part of the academic community.

Professional Growth

	A Great Deal	Some	Not Very Much	None At All	Total
How much progress do you feel you have made in...					
your ability to select research problems	40.7	51.2	7.0	1.1	100.0
your technical research skills	42.2	49.5	7.4	0.9	100.0
your understanding the big picture of which your research is a part	53.9	40.9	3.7	1.5	100.0
your commitment to working in your field	41.6	44.6	10.1	3.7	100.0
your ability to manage a research project	43.1	48.1	6.3	2.4	100.0
your ability to communicate your ideas	39.3	52.3	6.7	1.7	100.0
establishing a publication record	26.8	47.6	17.5	8.1	100.0

- Most postdoctoral scholars felt that they have made some progress in various areas since they began their postdoc position at UW-Madison. Postdocs reported having made the most progress in understanding the big picture of which their research is a part, and the least progress in establishing a publication record.

International Postdocs

English

English as First Language	14.9
English as Second Language	<u>85.1</u>
	100.0

Language Difficulty

A Great Deal of Difficulty	5.8
Some Difficulty	38.3
Very Little Difficulty	27.2
No Difficulty At All	<u>28.6</u>
	100.0

- Of the 242 postdocs who are non-US citizen, 85% reported English as their second language. Among those whose native language is not English, 44% had experience a great deal or some language difficulty.

VISA Info

Very Certain	27.8
Somewhat Certain	45.9
Neither	0.5
Somewhat Uncertain	19.6
Very Uncertain	<u>6.2</u>
	100.0

- About three-quarters of international postdocs said they are certain that they know where to obtain reliable information if they have questions about visa requirements and regulations.

Debt

Amount Owe on Student Loans

None	73.5
\$100 - \$5,000	5.7
\$5,001 - \$10,000	5.4
\$10,001 - \$20,000	4.6
\$20,001 - \$40,000	4.4
\$40,001 or more	2.7
Don't Know	2.2
Refused	<u>1.3</u>
	100.0

- Almost three-quarters of postdocs currently do not owe any student loans to banks or other financial institutions, while a very small percentage of postdocs currently owe more than \$40,000.

Amount of Total Debt

Increased	Stayed About the Same	Decreased	Total
16.5	39.1	44.3	100.0

Difficulty Making Debt Payments

Impossible	Very Difficult	Somewhat Difficult	Not At All Difficult	Total
5.1	10.2	33.1	51.7	100.0

- The majority of postdocs reported that their amount of total debt have stayed the same or decreased since they started their postdoc. Only one in six postdocs reported that their amount of total debt have increased.

- However, almost half of postdocs reported some level of difficulty making debt payments at the present time.

Family						
	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Family situation constraints job search	34.9	27.1	0.4	16.4	21.2	100.0
My career is secondary to my spouse or partner's career	7.7	21.7	1.8	31.3	37.5	100.0
	Extremely Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Neither	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Extremely Dissatisfied	Total
Amount of time spent in leisure activities	18.2	50.8	0.4	25.8	4.8	100.0
Amount of time spent with family	21.5	45.4	0.9	26.0	6.2	100.0

- Although 69% of postdocs who have a spouse or partner disagreed that their career is secondary to their spouse or partner's career, over 60% of postdocs agreed that their family situation constraints their job search.
- Sixty-nine percent of postdocs are satisfied with the amount of time they spent in leisure activities, and 67% percent are satisfied with the amount of time they spent with their family.