

CAREER DEVELOPMENT PANEL – RECENTLY HIRED FACULTY

Karlie Sharma

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The topic for this month's career development panel was recently hired faculty. The seminar consisted of panelists from the University of Maryland, Drexel University, NIDDK and NIAMS, each with a range of differing responsibilities. Each speaker offered insight into how they prepared to apply for their current position, what the interview process was like, what skills were most valuable and the complexities of starting at a new job.

The first panelist was Dr. Rachel Dennis, who obtained her PhD in Integrated Neuroscience at Purdue University. She is currently an assistant professor in the Department of Animal and Avian Sciences at the University of Maryland. She spends approximately 50% of her time writing, 20% in meetings and committee work, 10% in the lab and the last 20% on emails and reading. She notes that this is a typical daily layout for academic institutions. To obtain her position, she stressed the importance of networking and keeping up to date on soon to open positions at locations she was interested in applying to. When applying, she emphasized that, while "hard skills" such as laboratory techniques are important, you need to make sure your "soft skills" are also developed. Oral and written communication skills are key, as well as grant writing experience. During the interview, be clear about your goals and how you propose to fund yourself at the institute you are applying. Also familiarize yourself with the department you are applying to and BE ENTHUSIASTIC!

The next speaker was Dr. Ryan Petrie, who is a newly hired assistant professor in the Department of Biology at Drexel University. He also emphasized the importance of networking, with special focus on the "Chalk Talk". The chalk talk is very important when applying to any academic position and is one skill that must be acquired before applying. It is a loose talk with your potential department about your project ideas, how you will fund them and possible collaborations. This is a talk that should be practiced as much as possible prior to interviewing. Dr. Petrie also noted that there is no centralized location to find academic jobs and the best way to locate postings is through journal websites, such as Science and Nature.

The last two speakers, Dr. Astrid Haase and Dr. Markus Hafner, are both newly hired faculty here at the NIH. Astrid Haase is the Actin Section Chief of the RNA Biology Section at NIDDK, while Dr. Markus Hafner is a professor with the RNA Molecular Biology Group at NIAMS. They started by outlining key needs for applying to an academic position. Strong applicants will have strong papers, the ability to write grants, good oral and written communication skills and experience supervising students. When applying, establish your topic and hone your project ideas. Make sure to practice with peers and P.I.s in advance of your interview. Also be sure to apply early, as there is typically a one year delay from application to starting the job.

Once you have acquired the position, negotiate your startup money and prepare to begin to apply for grants!

Key Points:

1. NETWORKING! All speakers emphasized the importance of communicating and getting your research out there. The best way to do this is through conferences and meetings and presenting your work.
2. Grant writing – an applicant is much more desirable if they can bring in money for the institution. An even more competitive applicant will already have a grant such as a K99 or K22 upon applying for positions.
3. Make sure you have a clear and organized vision for your research. Where do you want your science to go? Have goals and funding directions prepared for your chalk talk.
4. Develop your soft skills such as oral and written communication, as well as supervisory roles.