

**2004 COSEPUP Convocation  
Talking Points for Facilitators**

**A-5) Diversity in Science: Promoting the Success of Minority Postdocs**

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The 2000 COSEPUP Postdoc Guide attempted to address issues of particular importance to postdocs who were members of underrepresented groups, but was unable to make a general statement due to the very small number of such postdocs surveyed. For the second Convocation, COSEPUP has worked with the NPA Diversity Committee to develop talking points for a breakout session on this topic.

What is the motivation for diversifying the scientific workforce, in particular the professoriate? In many instances, minority faculty serve as role models for the student population within their cultural peer group. There are very few minority faculty members. Since postdoctoral experience is becoming a requirement for competitive faculty candidates, it is imperative that minority postdoctoral career development be addressed.

1. What are the demographics of minority postdocs? How are “minority”, “diversity”, and “under-representation” defined within the context of the postdoctoral experience? What are the number of minority postdocs and their distribution among disciplines? What is the attrition rate for minority postdocs? What data exist on career outcomes?
2. What are effective strategies for minority recruitment into postdoctoral positions and subsequent career stages? What factors affect retention, for example, mentoring, career development, networking, and community building?
3. What financial resources are available for minorities to pursue their education and careers? What are the pros/cons of minority vs. majority postdoctoral fellowships, travel awards, etc? Is “separate, but equal” good for the minority postdoc? Are programs (i.e. fellowships, travel awards, etc.) that have been established to encourage the participation of underrepresented minorities in science-related disciplines actually “hurting” or “marginalizing” the individuals these programs seek to support?
4. What networking opportunities are available for minorities? What are the pros/cons of networking within your cultural peer group versus a wider scientific population?
5. While it is important that a minority see community members in their field, mentors do not have to be minorities themselves. How can mentors be sensitized to respect the values and priorities of an ethnic/cultural community? Such mentor education presents different challenges at majority and minority serving institutions.
6. Can affirmative action ideals and/or policies be applied to independent fellowships and non-advertised postdoc positions?
7. Are there appropriate grievance mechanisms to handle incidents of racism, sexism, etc?
8. How do we address the imbalance between work and “outside” activities such as family, outreach, and volunteer activities. Are minorities penalized for their emphasis on these activities?
9. What are the best practices for addressing minority postdoc needs and concerns? What channels are there to publicize such programs? What roles do individuals, institutions, professional societies, funding agencies, etc play in supporting minority postdocs?

***Related Articles and Resources:***

Minority Scientists Network <http://www.miscinet.org>

“Minority Postdocs Are Rare, Independent Breed”, J. Mervis, *Science* 285(5433):1529 (Sep 3, 1999), <http://www.sciencemag.org/cgi/content/full/285/5433/1529>

“Building Diversity in the Scientific Workforce”, Report from NSF Minority Postdoctoral Research Fellows and Mentors Annual Meeting, 1996, <http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/1998/nsf9837/nsf9837.pdf>

***To remain involved with this discussion, please visit:***

<http://www.minoritypostdoc.org>

[http://www.nationalpostdoc.org/committees/diversity\\_committee](http://www.nationalpostdoc.org/committees/diversity_committee)

At the release of *Enhancing the Postdoctoral Experience for Scientists and Engineers*, little was known about the status of minority postdocs in the U.S. Since 2000, the National Postdoc Association (NPA) has been formed, and the Diversity Committee, as a part of the NPA, is exploring the issue of diversity in science.

Alberto Roca, a member of the NPA Diversity Committee, approached Laure Haak about creating a breakout session on Diversity in Science for the COSEPUP Postdoc Convocation in April 2004. After receiving COSEPUP approval, Alberto worked with NPA Diversity Committee to create talking points.

What is the motivation for diversifying the scientific workforce? Drawing from a resolution by the Council of Graduate Schools on building an inclusive community ([www.cgsnet.org/PublicationsPolicyRes/resolutions.htm#resolution2](http://www.cgsnet.org/PublicationsPolicyRes/resolutions.htm#resolution2)), some reasons are as follows:

- Serves the best interests of higher education and the nation at large
- Enhances the educational and scholarly activities of all students and faculty and is sound academic policy
- Engenders respect for intellect
- Contributes to creating a truly pluralistic society

Issues that emerged from the Diversity in Science breakout session were as follows:

#### ISSUES

- Commitment to diversity may exist at institutional level, but not at individual [PI] level
- Graduate students/faculty unaware of resources for minorities
- Changing climate toward "minority" programs/affirmative action
- Culture in higher education in U.S. not conducive to balancing needs of mentor with those of postdoc

Action points that emerged from this session are listed below:

#### SOLUTIONS

- Educate at all levels about diversity programs and resources (resources specifically for minority postdocs include: [www.minoritypostdoc.org](http://www.minoritypostdoc.org); [www.nationalpostdoc.org/committees/diversity\\_committee/](http://www.nationalpostdoc.org/committees/diversity_committee/))
- Network both within ethnic community and within disciplines (resources include: [www.sacnas.org](http://www.sacnas.org); [www.aises.org](http://www.aises.org); [www.abrcms.org](http://www.abrcms.org))
- Encourage postdocs to take responsibility and be proactive in their own career development
- Train faculty/PI's via effective mentoring programs; consider a "bi-cultural" model, with a mentor of the same ethnic background, and a majority mentor; encourage postdocs to develop relationships with multiple mentors
- Explore best practices / existing outreach models, such as:
  - Preparing Future Faculty (PFF)
  - Project Kaleidoscope
  - GEM: National Consortium for Graduate Degrees for Minorities in Engineering and Science ([https://ws4.nd.edu/gem/gemwebapp/gem\\_00\\_000.htm](https://ws4.nd.edu/gem/gemwebapp/gem_00_000.htm))
  - Leadership Alliance (<http://theleadershipalliance.org>)
  - CFD: Compact for Faculty Diversity (<http://www.sreb.org/programs/dsp/dspindex.asp>)