SPSP GSC

The FORUM

Advice from Those Who Have Come Before

In the GSC's recent survey (see page 7 for more details), graduate student members of SPSP mentioned they would like more information about post graduate school career/post-doc positions. In response to that request the GSC put out a call through the SPSP listserv for recent Social/Personality Psychology graduates who were willing to share their experiences and advice. The response was fantastic and the GSC sends out their heartfelt thanks to all the recent graduates who took time out of their busy transitions to share their advice and experiences with us. In this issue of the FORUM you will find three articles dedicated to sharing the responses from new Faculty members, Post-Docs, and recent grads working in non-academic positions separately. We hope you will find these articles as informative and interesting as we did.

What's the Buzz About Post-Docs?

If you're a student in Personality or Social Psychology and are even remotely *thinking* about an academic career upon graduation, you've no doubt heard countless times that post-doctoral fellowships are often just the thing needed to help you land that terrific and oft-coveted tenure-track assistant professorship. But, what benefit does taking a post-doc really provide? How should you go about looking for one—and what should you look for? What should you expect in such a position, and how does it differ from a faculty position?

Knowing the answers to these and other pertinent questions pertaining to post-docs *before* you go on the job market is important. So, with this in mind, the GSC decided to find out more about post-doctoral fellowships from the experts: recent graduates working in such positions. Three SPSP members currently working as post-docs responded to our call for help, two of which work in academic institutions and one whom works in a government agency. Key themes from their responses to our ques-

tions are reported here.

The post-doc: Should you get one?
Perhaps one of the first things you might ask yourself is, is it *really* necessary to take a post-doc, or should I just head straight into the academic job market? Our post-docs unanimously agreed that taking a post-doc position can help broaden one's experiences and better suit you for the job market. Our respondents mentioned learning new research skills, including new research methodologies; how to use special equipment; how to become a better writer; how to write (and get!) grants; and even how one's research overlaps with other social science specializations. Do you think it'd be useful to learn how to read EEGs? fMRIs? Want to learn how to conduct web-based studies? Interested in becoming a better writer, while simultaneously strengthening your publication record? If so, then a post-doc may just be the best way to acquire these skills. However, a post-doc is not for everyone. As one of our respondents put it, "Do you need additional training that you can't get in your program? Would another person's perspective help you fully develop

your ideas? If so, consider a post doc. If not, and if your publication record is up to it, go straight to the job market."

So, what are the downsides?
Sounds great so far, right? Well, the reality is that, like all jobs, taking a post-doctoral fellowship has its disadvantages. Among these, our post-docs stressed a few key ones. First, there are limits on what you can do that just aren't put on faculty members. These often include "some limitations on what (research) topics you can focus on." As well, there may be limitations on how much authority you have in the department. Our post-docs mentioned having to rely on their faculty member rather than making decisions independently. Faculty members were needed to sign important documents, make decisions concerning research projects, and even serve as the PI on grants written by and for post-docs. These experiences can actually work *against* preparing you for an academic career. As one respondent said, "Some of those barriers make it difficult to really gain the experience that a faculty

Out of the Ivory Tower: Non-Academic Positions

Research Psychologist:

Working for NASA sounds like a cool job. That is what this Research Psychologist does and has been doing for over a year and a half now. Research designing/analyzing/writing-up, coding archival data, giving advice about research designs, advocating/proposing research, and supervising non-PhDs are just a few of the many daily activities this individual performs. Among the many surprises: "…the bureaucratic bottlenecks and requirements for paperwork/supervisor sign-offs for things that I had assumed were normal academic freedoms. For example, before I present at a conference, my presentation needs to go through my supervisor, the head of the department, legal department, and export control."

The respondent stated that the most difficult aspect of the job search was "uncertainly combined with timing;" and that the easiest was the actual interview – "more fun and more relaxed." Advice for job seekers: "Often people will reject you for reasons that have nothing to do with you so don't feel too bad. Their needs for the position may change, for example. Just keep trying." Further, the respondent stated that it is wise not to expect every prospective employer to act professionally: they may never even tell you that you've been rejected.

This individual recalled that the most difficult part of the transition phase was the unrealistic expectations in that they assumed a certain level of preparedness and smoothness that just wasn't there in working for the government. Also, as is most likely the case with all bureaucratic positions, having to quickly learn and be able to use acronyms is difficult. On the other hand, the easiest part of the transition was research: "research is research." This research psychologist listed that processes and content were the two major areas of learning that has taken place in the transition. In closing, this NASA researcher suggested that "If you love research, [the government is] definitely a viable place to work. Also, try not to limit yourself, but think about what kinds of things suit your temperament. Academia is not always the best place for everyone but it's not a failing."

Research Associate:

Only having had the title of Research Associate for less than a month, this fresh graduate secured the position after having worked in the same position while in grad school. Duties of this position were normal "research-type" duties (i.e., survey designs, lit reviews, report writing, etc.). This individual found the most difficult part of the job search to be salary and benefit negotiation, but said the best advice received while job seeking was to keep all options open.

"I wish I knew that going applied didn't mean working for evil corporations to sell people things they don't need. I work for a firm that does a lot of evaluation and design work for non-profit organizations, which is very rewarding," the individual stated when asked to reflect upon information he or she wish they knew beforehand. The hardest part of the transition was "feeling comfortable in my professional ability;" whereas, the easiest was getting to work full-time with enjoyable people. "I've learned that being able to write well is a very marketable skill. It's surprising how many people struggle to express themselves (and how well you can be paid to do it for them)," the individual mused. It is further noted that training in statistics and development of writing skills were the best things learned in grad school for this particular position. "I'd say to try to get out into the 'real world' if you're interested in going applied. It's not as scary and negative as we sometimes think it will be."

Behavioral Scientist:

This Behavioral Scientist who works for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the Division of STD Prevention certainly had much to say about the six years in the position. Ideally, the individual stated, "we apply research to program practice." The individual submitted a laundry list of day-to-day duties that include working with teams of specialized people (social scientists, doctors, epidemiologists, lab scientists, and health specialists), constructing/evaluating of management programs for partners of STD-infected individuals, and explaining sexual behaviors of people with greater likeliness for exposure to STDs. A shocker for the respondent: "public health is a bigger field than I anticipated."

Graduate Poster Award: New and Improved!

The Graduate Student Poster Award has been offered for the last three years at the SPSP conference. This year, we will be expanding the award. Three awards will be given out each poster session — one First-Place award and two Runner-Up awards — to students whose poster presentations reflects excellence in research, clarity in presentation, and personal knowledge in a discussion with the judges. Students who enter the competition are interviewed by three "secret" judges throughout the poster session, and these judges select the winners. Award winners receive a small monetary prize and public recognition for their achievement.

Eligibility

To be eligible for an award, applicants must:

- Be the first author on a poster submission
- Be a full-time graduate student at the time of submission
- Be a student member of SPSP
- Present their poster research at the SPSP conference
- Be presenting a poster that reflects the applicants' work, and not that of an advisor

Student members can apply for the award multiple times, with the exception that students who receive an award are not eligible for consideration in the year following their award.

Award Criteria

Winners are selected by a committee that considers the GPA submission, the poster itself, and a conversation held with the presenter at the poster session. In the poster, the committee looks for a concise statement of the research problem, a clear statement of methods, appropriate data analysis, conclusions that are warranted by the data, an explanation of why the work is important, and a well organized and clear presentation. In the conversation with the presenter, the committee is interested in the applicant's level of understanding of the research, ability to describe the work to non-experts and experts, and the degree to which the work represents the student's own intellectual effort.

This Year's Award

We are pleased to announce that we will be awarding 7 First-Place GPAs (one at each poster session). First-Place winners will be awarded the following:

- An award certificate
- A $100 monetary award
- Free personal copies of MediaLab and/or DirectRT for the remainder of their graduate student career, plus one year post-graduation. The software can be used on up to two computers or laptops, and is provided courtesy of Empirisoft.
- The winner's choice of either: a DirectIN Millisecond Precision Keyboard (value $290) or a DirectIN Precision Response Box with Custom Button Layout (value $390), provided courtesy of Empirisoft
- Their poster displayed in a designated "GPA Winners" area of the poster area for the duration of the conference.

We will also provide 2 Runners-Up GPAs each poster session. Runner-Up winners will be awarded:

- An award certificate
- A $50 monetary award

The names of all First-Place and Runner-Up award winners will also be published in a subsequent issue of *Dialogue* and in the *FORUM*.

Application and Award Process

Applying for an award consists of a simple two-step process.

Step 1. If your first-authored poster has been accepted for the 2006 SPSP program, you may then apply for a GPA by emailing a 500-word award submission statement to the SPSP Graduate Student Committee at spspgsc@yahoo.com. The submission should not exceed 500 words and should include four separate sections:

- The problem or major purpose
- Procedure
- Results
- Conclusions

Your award submission statement should be accompanied by a letter from your research or academic advisor attesting that the work that is to be presented is the result of your own product, and not that of your advisor. These letters do not need to be kept confidential. They can be emailed to the SPSP Graduate Student Committee at spspgsc@yahoo.com either with or separately from your submission statement.

The deadline for Step 1 is October 31st, 2005.

Step 2. Send a copy of your completed SPSP poster being considered for an award to the SPSP Graduate Student Committee at spspgsc@yahoo.com.

Note: The deadline for Step 2 of the 2006 award application process is December 15th, 2005. You must complete both steps of the application process in order to be considered for a Graduate Poster Award.

You have nothing to lose. Remember, if you do not apply you can not win!

Upcoming Submission Deadlines

American Psychological Society	1/31/06
Eastern Psychological Association	TBA
Midwestern Psychological Association	11/01/05
New England Psychological Association	TBA
Rocky Mountain Psychological Association	TBA
Southeastern Psychological Association	10/11/05
Southwestern Psychological Association	11/14/05
Western Psychological Association	11/15/05

More at www.spsp.org/student.

Words of Wisdom: New Faculty Share Their Experiences

Many graduate students of Social Psychology and Personality strive for positions in academia. Eleven respondents to the GSC's call for recent PhD graduates have nabbed one of those coveted positions. Here is what they were willing to share in terms of their experiences on the job market and on the transition to the job of Professor. Eight of these new faculty members are tenure track in a Psychology department, two are in temporary faculty positions, and one is a Professor of Law. Most of our respondents had been in their current position for no more than a month (n = 6), while two individuals were going into their second year and one was entering their third year.

What's new and surprising? There were a range of issues that respondents found surprising in their new positions such as adjusting to the demands of teaching, how much you are expected to figure out on your own in terms of campus logistics for parking or building keys, and the one any of us would dread: "My office still isn't ready." Believe it or not, some respondents were faced with pleasant surprises, such as the respondent who replied that "I was actually surprised most that they completely protect new faculty from service for 1 year." Another new Professor found that they now have more time to do their research and write than they did as a grad student, and one respondent was surprised to be doing significantly less teaching than they would have expected.

The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly (aka the Job Search). When asked what they found most difficult about the job search process the top two answers were "the waiting" and "the

uncertainty." Other responses included finding schools that were a good fit, knowing you will be moving, rejection, and having to be "on" all day long during on-site job interviews. There were some aspects of the job seeking processing respondents found surprisingly enjoyable, such as putting job materials together. One respondent replied that "It forced me to think about the direction of my research for years down the road," and another respondent who found the all day interviews to be less stressful than they thought mused that "Talking with extremely intelligent people about social psychology is energizing!"

Sharing Advice Received and Some They Wish They Had. The general theme concerning advice that these new Professors received while on the job market was be prepared.

Specifically, they were told to start to generate materials early, check out websites of people you may interview with, and try not to be too generic when submitting applications. In terms of the job talk these recent graduates were told "You are the expert on your job talk topic- don't forget that," and "practice your talk more than you think you should." Finally, one person was told "Apply to everything, interview, and THEN decide if it's a job you want."

When asked to share one thing they wish they had known beforehand, some of the responses were that they wished they knew "how much politics (who your advisor was) and preferences for people with a certain race/gender/marital status plays into whether you get a job offer;" "how to respond to questions related to funding (e.g., what are you looking for in terms of start up funds?);" and that "several people who are regarded as "big shots" didn't get jobs their first year on the market".

Statistics Regarding Applications Interviews, Offers, and Publication Record for Recent Graduates Currently in Faculty Positions.

Range	Mean	Mode
Applications 9-100	44.45	80
Interviews		
Phone* 2-30	5	2
On Campus* 1-19	4	3
Job Offers * 1-5	1.7	1
Publications		
First Authored 0-4	1.6	2
Co-Authored 0-7	3.0	2

* Many respondents reported canceling interviews or withdrawing applications after receiving an offer they wanted to take therefore these numbers are more representative of "interviews and offers prior to offer acceptance".

Buzz on Post Docs - Continued from Page 1

member would have because you're still treated as a grad student."

Another downside our post-docs mentioned was feeling "in limbo:" a post-doc is clearly not a grad student, but also not *quite* a faculty member. This can lead to unanticipated social isolation. The fact is that "post-docs often slip through the cracks." They are often excluded (unintentionally or intentionally) from faculty functions as well as student functions, leading some post-docs to feel "out of the loop." These types of experiences were mentioned frequently by our respondents. However, this may not be a bad thing if you crave independence. As one stated, "I feel like a senior level grad student with fewer responsibilities and more status."

Finally, one post-doc pointed out that setting up at a new department was an unanticipated downside of the position. Setting up for this particular person took about six months. Unpacking into a new office and learning a new system (including procedures, getting door keys, and learning how to work voicemail) all while wrapping up research conducted in graduate school <u>and</u> starting new lines of research can be a bit overwhelming, as pointed out by our post-docs. So, be prepared for a long work day— one respondent admitted to working 110 hours a week on a regular basis!

What about the application process? Our respondents all had different experiences with the application process. While some post-docs surveyed relied on word-of-mouth to find a position, others actively looked at job ads. The hardest part, according to one respondent, was finding the "right person to work with." The "right person" doesn't

only include someone whose research interests you, but also someone whom you get along with and can develop a good working relationship with. However, our respondents agreed that the application process was less time-consuming, less anxiety-producing, and less stressful than applying for an academic position.

So, what's the bottom line? In conclusion, a post-doctoral fellowship might be just the thing for you, particularly if you want to gain new skills and better prepare yourself for

the academic job market. Overall, our post-docs had excellent things to say about their positions, and were very happy with the choices they made. But, remember to be selective, as not all post-doc positions will be beneficial. As one post-doc said, "you don't have to take a job just because it's offered to you if it's not the right fit." In sum, if you do decide to take the post-doc step, be sure that it'll be useful to you in the long run—this appears to be the key to satisfaction with the position.

President's Corner

Hello fellow grad students. With comps and defenses coming and going, this is already shaping up to be a very busy year for all of us. I wanted to take a brief moment to pass on a few updates and announcements that I am not sure have been made known to everyone.

In August, I attended the APA Convention in Washington, DC. It was a success. I tried to make it to most of the Division 8 programs. I ended up meeting some of you during the poster sessions and mentor luncheon. The Executive Committee was impressed with the quality of representation that we demonstrated during this convention. So, kudos to all those who presented.

During the SPSP Executive Committee meeting (directly following the APA convention), several requests from the GSC were approved. Notably, the GSC's restructuring of the Graduate Poster Award and its funding was approved. During the discussion, Brenda Major (President Elect of SPSP) made a plea for larger award amounts. In turn, the GSC has been approved to offer one First Place award for $100 and two Runner-Up awards for $50 for each of the seven poster sessions. The GSC's Past President, Michele, is currently organizing this and can be contacted if you have any questions.

As in years past, we will also be hosting a pre-conference this year over the topic of Careers. As in years past, we are hoping to keep the costs low, and see about getting away without a registration fee – no promises as of right now, though. If you have any interest in helping out with this, please contact me. We should have a formal announcement with a schedule out within a few weeks after we have secured all the speakers and sessions.

We will again be hosting a Mentor Lunch in collaboration with the SPSP Training Committee during the Annual Meeting in Palm Springs. You should be receiving information in the next few weeks about this, including how to sign up, etc.

The Palm Springs convention is shaping up to be a good convention. We appreciate your interest and ideas. Please feel free to contact any of us on the GSC if you have any questions.

Finally, in the next few months, a call for nominations will be going out concerning next year's GSC. If you are interested or know someone you would like to nominate, be sure to make your voice heard.

More at www.spsp.org/student.

New Faculty Wisdom

What is Useful about Grad School? We asked these new Professors what they found most helpful (important) in their graduate school training for their new position. And the answer was "it depends." For respondents with a primary focus on teaching, the feeling was that experiences teaching undergraduate courses during graduate school and participating in programs like "Preparing Future Faculty (PFF)" were most beneficial. However, for those with a primary interest in research, respondents indicated the benefits of establishing "unique and autonomous research programs," "working on multiple research projects concurrently," "presenting at conferences and brown bags as much as possible," and taking advantage of every "advanced statistics and research methods class possible."

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Behavioral Scientist

The job seeking process was seen as difficult in that the first level of the application process (for the CDC position) was not done by subject matter experts and the application pool was large. Unfortunately, this respondent wrote that they did not find anything surprisingly easy about the job seeking process.

"Spread a wide net," answered the respondent about the best advice received. Continuing, in response to the "one thing you wish you knew before" question, the individual stated that getting an academic position was not easy with only a handful of published articles (contrary to what was suggested by grad school faculty).

The respondent stated that the easiest part of the transition was the fact that it is a lucrative position to be in: "Very prosaic – I'm well-paid by most academic standards."

"I've learned plenty about true interdisciplinary, multilevel work, and I doubt many academic positions have the CDC's link between research and large-scale application." The individual reminisced that the most useful thing learned in grad school was writing about research. Final thoughts: "think about what you'd like to be doing in broad terms."

All articles presented in this issue of the Forum were written by members of the GSC and respresent only the opinions of that author. All articles were edited by Lavonia Smith-LeBeau. The design and layout were produced by Camille Johnson.

Closing Advice From Each of Our Respondents…

"Count January and February out as far as getting any research or writing done. Also, keep some money ready to front the travel costs. Be sure your credit card has money available."

"Apply widely. Be flexible."

"Be patient and don't take rejection personally."

"Relax, be yourself and remember that you are interviewing them as much as the other way around. Be modest and gracious and articulate- it goes a long way."

"If you don't hear from any of the schools you're interested in, try not to take it too personally. Several factors go into hiring someone, most of which have nothing to do with you."

"Make a support group with fellow students going on the job market."

"Whatever you do, try to make a positive *social* impression on the people who are interviewing you. Even if you are quite introverted (which I am), bite the bullet for your phone and campus interviews and try to come across as outgoing and friendly."

"Keep an open mind."

"If you're interested in teaching, try to participate in a program like PFF, and seek out a variety of teaching experiences while in graduate school if at all possible."

"Bring extra clothes/shoes. Weather will strand you somewhere and you feel like an idiot walking to dinner in sweats and high heels."

"Don't rush to get into the job market. Don't be afraid or embarrassed to spend a year or two extra in grad school if you don't think you're ready."

Last, but not least....

We asked for it and you responded: Results of the SPSP graduate student survey

Participant Information:

Participants were primarily female (64%) graduate student members of SPSP (91%). On average, participants had been in school 3.2 years, with a modal response of two years.

We found that most respondents (82%) had been a first author on a poster presentation, with a mean of 3.87 first-author poster presentations. SPSP was the most frequently cited conference outlet for poster presentations, followed by regional conferences, and the annual APA convention. Fewer participants (43%) indicated that they had been a first author on a paper that was presented at a conference. Of these, the mean number of papers presented was 2.5. Papers were most often presented at regional conferences, followed by SPSP, APS, and then APA. About a quarter of respondents (26%) indicated that they had been a first author on a publication in a peer-reviewed journal. Of these the mean number of publications was 1.76, and the median and mode were 1. Participants published in a variety of outlets, including *JPSP* ($n = 4$), *JESP* ($n = 3$), *PSPB* ($n = 3$), *BASP* ($n = 2$), *Psychological Science* ($n = 2$), *Journal of Social Psychology* ($n = 2$), and *Social Cognition* ($n = 2$).

Current Services

We asked participants about the usefulness of the current services that the GSC offers (for more information on these, visit the "Student Corner" on the SPSP website. Table 1 presents these results. Respondents indicated that conference information, non-academic job postings, and the graduate student poster award are among the most useful services that the GSC offers.

Future Services

We asked respondents how much they would like to see the GSC offer four additional services on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 10 (very much). Participants expressed the greatest interest in more funding information on the web site ($n = 131$, $M = 8.5$, $SD = 1.92$). Interest in online training resources on graduate student related topics was a close second ($n = 134$, $M = 8.32$, $SD = 1.94$). These were followed by interest in an online student message/bulletin board ($n = 125$, $M = 5.23$, $SD = 2.73$) and an international student interest group ($n = 111$, $M = 5.23$, $SD = 3.02$). Note that most participants were likely American, so the smaller numbers here probably shouldn't be taken as an indication of the usefulness of the service. A minority of members may find this service particularly useful.

We also had space for respondents to submit their own suggestions for future GSC activities. These suggestions were far ranging, but often focused on the provision of more information and resources related to finding academic and non-academic jobs. Several people also mentioned a desire for more funding information and additional resources for teaching.

How we are incorporating this information

In response to these results, the GSC is working on several initiatives. In addition to the current services such as non-academic job postings, the graduate student poster award, the student listserv, the career pre-conference, and the FORUM, we are in the final stages of providing additional teaching resources on our web site (www.spsp.org/student). We have also recently revamped the poster award process to increase the ability of judges to spend ample time with posters in each session and to increase the number of awards in each poster session. Although we are unable to create an online bulletin board for students, we encourage members to use the student listserv to ask questions of other students. This can be a great resource, for example, for finding affordable housing at the annual SPSP conference or finding others to share expenses. There is also a bulletin board available at the website of the Social Psychology Network that is available to students and others (http://www.socialpsychology.org/). Finally, we continue to develop resources for international students, such as an international student group.

If you would like to help with any of these projects or would like more information, let us know! We'd love to hear from you.

Table 1 – Current Services

	N	M	SD
Conference Info	120	7.91	2.32
Non-Academic Job Posting	107	7.95	2.30
Grad Student Poster Award	119	7.91	2.33
Student Listserv	112	7.50	2.29
Web Links	99	7.30	2.27
SPSP Career Pre-conference	76	6.71	2.90
SPSP Mentor Lunch	80	6.36	2.83
FORUM	74	6.22	2.32
Dear Sigmunda	72	4.50	2.48

Scale from 1 (least useful) to 10 (most useful)

More at www.spsp.org/student.