Postdocs reimagined

As part of their NEXTGEN VOICES series, Science asked young scientists if the idea of the postdoc position is obsolete. If so, what should replace it, and if not, how can it be improved? From over 300 submissions, these Cornell BEST Program participants’ responses were selected for their ideas, published in the July 3rd issue. Science 3 July 2015 Vol. 349 no. 6243 pp. 24-27 DOI: 10.1126/science.349.6243.24

“With an increasing number of Ph.D. graduates aiming to pursue nonacademic career tracks, there is an urgent need to revamp the traditional postdoc position, the majority of which do not prepare graduates for jobs outside academia. A systemic integration of career support into Ph.D. programs in all universities is critical to ensure that maximum returns are channeled from the national investment in graduate education. An experiential 1-year career-rotation program (not unlike first-year lab rotations) should follow graduation. Ph.D. graduates would have the opportunity to pursue three to four internships in different settings that value a terminal degree in their field of study. Examples of organizations for which the graduates might intern include science societies, policy think-tanks, law firms, regulatory affairs teams, nonprofit organizations, government agencies, and biotech start-ups. The graduates could be placed in these internships through a matching process facilitated by the university and funded by stakeholders in the process. Such a transition program would be transformative for the educational ecosystem because it would help students identify and gain a foothold in the career track of their choice, allow employers access to a pool of highly qualified job candidates, and help participating universities bolster their student success metrics.”

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“…The increasing rarity of tenure-track positions means that postdocs need to be prepared for jobs that are significantly less attractive. One must honestly answer the question “What am I willing to give up for a career in academia?” before proceeding toward a postdoc.”

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