



CAIRIBU ARCTICS COMMUNITY FORUM

TRANSITIONING FROM GRADUATE SCHOOL TO POSTDOC: WHAT I WISH I KNEW

EXECUTIVE
SUMMARY
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ARCTICS COMMUNITY FORUM

FEAT: TERESA LIU, PHD, ACACIA WHITE, PHD, SONIA FARGUE, MD, PHD, MICHAEL NEUGENT, PHD

GOAL: Provide advice on choosing a lab, setting expectations, and preparing for the next step after grad school

Summary

Roundtable

Introductions

- **Acacia White, PhD** completed her PhD at East Carolina University and is now a postdoc at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in the lab of Johanna Hannan, PhD.
- **Michael Neugent, PhD** is Assistant Professor of Urology at University of Rochester; he completed both his PhD and postdoc at the University of Texas at Dallas.
- **Teresa Liu, PhD** is Assistant Professor of Pharmaceutical Sciences at St. John Fisher University; she completed her PhD at University of Tennessee Health Science Center and completed postdocs at Carnegie Mellon University and University of Pittsburgh.
- **Sonia Fargue, MD, PhD** is Associate Professor of Urology at the University of Alabama at Birmingham; she graduated from University College London and completed her postdoc at University of Alabama at Birmingham.



Postdoc search in hindsight

- Speakers were asked to describe their approach to their postdoc searches, describe one thing they wish they knew when choosing a lab, and offer one challenge or surprise encountered during the transition from graduate school to a postdoc position.
 - **Networking and mentoring can influence how you choose your lab** and your experience as a postdoc.
 - Moving from one location to another – whether it's states with different climates or different countries – can be a big shift.
 - It's important to align research interests with potential postdoc opportunities, particularly if you work in a niche field. **It can also be helpful to understand how the skills and knowledge you have in one area can translate to other areas.**
 - A postdoc is an opportunity to explore different fields and gain new skills.

Preparing for next steps after graduate school

- Think ahead about your goals in 2, 5, or 7 years and what you need to do at different points to meet your goals:
 - Start preparing for your postdoc in the 3rd or 4th year of grad school.
 - Develop a professional network; connections can help you find a postdoc when you're ready to start looking.
 - Ensure your goals and interests align with potential labs and mentors.
 - **Communicate transparently with your former mentor and your new mentor** to wrap up or continue working on your graduate school projects and how this might be balanced with your future postdoctoral work.

Lab selection

- **Speak with former lab members** to understand the lab culture, mentorship style, and opportunities for growth.

- Ask questions about expectations, work-life balance, and the lab's research focus. **Reflect on how you can advance the lab's work**, including contributing to old projects, and what you will gain from working in this lab that will help you reach your career goals.
- Consider the mentor's track record in mentoring trainees with similar next steps. How many mentees have successfully gone on to tenure track positions, industry, or whatever you envision your next steps to be?

Personal factors in choosing a lab

- The people you work can influence how positive of an experience you have.
- Weigh the costs and benefits of relocation (domestically and internationally) and what impact that may have on you and your family, whether the relocation is temporary or permanent.
- Align your personal and long-term career goals.

Funding opportunities

- **Apply early-on to get practice in grant writing.**
- Solidifying research plans that have room to grow into something bigger is helpful when looking for funding.
- A mentor's track record of postdocs receiving grants (federal fellowships, foundation grants, etc) is a good indicator the mentor has experience in helping you write your first grant.

A recording of this forum, as well as those from many prior CAIRIBU ARCTICS Community forums, is available on the CAIRIBU YouTube channel [HERE](#). Find the playlist called “**ARCTICS Community Forums**” to view the more than 2 dozen recorded ARCTICS forums posted there.