

# The POSTDOCket

The Official Newsletter of the National Postdoctoral Association

Fall 2006 Volume 4, Issue 4

system, in which the U.S. produces approximately 5,000 Ph.D's each year but only 1,200 new faculty positions, as an ethical crisis.

Sessions during the main meeting focused on graduate training and how to prepare young scientists for careers outside academic research. The issues raised, and the energy given to them, represents a significant shift in the mindset of academic researchers as they wrestle with the sometimes conflicting needs of institutions and those they train.

For the first time, a separate portion of the meeting was dedicated to the issues and needs of postdoctoral leaders. Those attending the meeting voted unanimously to formally organize a new section of GREAT devoted to postdoctoral leaders. This group would build on the positive relationship between GREAT and the NPA, allow more focused attention on postdoc-specific issues, and provide a formal mechanism for these issues to be addressed by AAMC and GREAT. The NPA should take pride in knowing that its' efforts to work collaboratively with organizations like GREAT have resulted in elevating postdoctoral training to equal footing with other professional training programs.

*Keith Micoli, Ph.D. is the chair of the NPA board.*

## Postdoctoberfest (or, how a bad pun turned into a good party)

*Molly Starback*

On October 27, Duke University held the world's first Postdoctoberfest, an appreciation event for postdocs, along with the faculty and staff who support them. Postdoctoberfest was, by all accounts, a smashing success. Over 200 postdocs, faculty and staff attended to feast on bratwurst, knockwurst and tofuwurst while enjoying the lively bluegrass of the Big Fat Gap Band.

The highlight of the party was the presentation of awards to the Outstanding Postdoc and Outstanding Postdoc Mentor at Duke. Although only two awards were presented, everyone who was nominated (45 mentors and postdocs in all) received a congratulatory letter from the Office of Postdoctoral Services and the Duke University Postdoctoral Association (DUPA).

Dr. James Siedow, Vice Provost for Research, presented the award for Outstanding Postdoc Mentor to Dr. Farsh Guilak, Director of the Orthopaedic Bioengineering Laboratory. Dr. Guilak's nominators praised him as someone who mentors by example as a lab leader, a scientist, and a father. Dr. Guilak manages a lab of 28 students, postdocs, and staff, is the Editor in Chief of a major journal, serves as the PI for numerous grants, and is in the midst of developing a start-up company. Despite these responsibilities, he has steadfastly supported, challenged, and encouraged his postdocs as they develop their own research paths. He meets with his postdocs regularly and provides annual reviews of their individual development plans, he provides grant application recommendations and support (all five of his postdocs have their own funding), and he has an open-door policy that allows for frequent advice and discussion.

Dr. Sally Kornbluth, Vice Dean for the Basic Sciences, presented the award for Outstanding Postdoc to Dr. Xiaopeng Zhao of the Department of Biomedical Engineering. Dr. Zhao received nominations from his mentor, from a student in one of his classes, and from an officer of the professional society in which he serves. Dr. Zhao's research uses techniques of nonlinear dynamics to study the mechanisms underlying cardiac arrhythmias such as ventricular fibrillation, and he has established an excellent record of publication. All three of Dr. Zhao's nominators praised not only his research achievements, but also his service, teaching, and mentoring activities at Duke.

Finally, Dr. Siedow presented a surprise award for Outstanding Postdoc Leader to Dr. Elizabeth Johnson, president of the Duke University Postdoctoral Association. Dr. Siedow described Dr. Johnson as a force for positive change for postdocs on the Duke campus. He noted that Dr. Johnson has been instrumental in crafting the new postdoc policy, which mandates a minimum salary level and provides equal access to health insurance regardless of source of funding. Dr. Johnson also led the effort to establish the new postdoc office at Duke, and has built DUPA from a relatively small group into a well-organized team that hosts numerous professional and social events for Duke postdocs. Needless to say, Dr. Johnson has done all this while maintaining her own research.

After the awards ceremony, the party resumed until not a crumb of pretzel or drop of Märzenbier remained. Everyone had a good time, which was the point, but we want the larger point to extend beyond the month of October: at Duke, we value our postdocs. Their efforts, and those of the faculty mentors who guide and support them, are worthy of our respect, reward, recognition – and a really good party!

*Molly Starback is Director at Duke Office of Postdoctoral Services.*



**The NPA Store**

***New designs now  
available!***

[www.cafepress.com/thenpastore](http://www.cafepress.com/thenpastore)