

Careers

We talked with *Patricia Sokolove*, Deputy Director of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Intramural Training & Education (OITE) and this month's Biophysicist in Profile, to learn more about the training programs at the NIH offered through the NIH Intramural Research Program (IRP). "The goal of the OITE is to help trainees in the IRP develop scientific and professional skills that will enable them to become leaders in the biomedical research community," Sokolove says. She shared with us just how Society members can benefit from these programs.

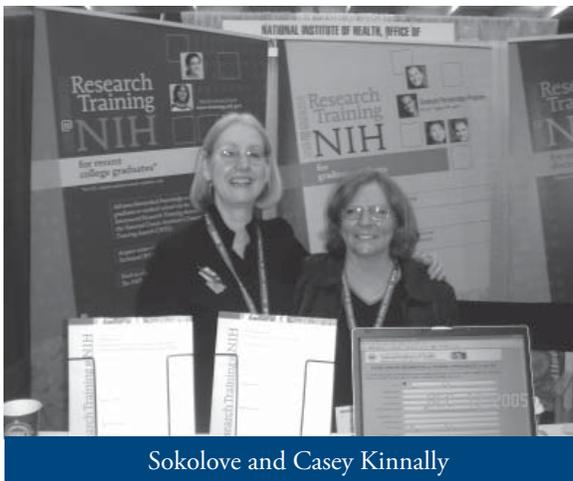
Programs for all levels. The IRP offers programs for young scientists at various stages of their careers.

- The Summer Internship program hosts approximately 1,200 students a year—high school, college, graduate, and professional school students alike—for 8-10 weeks as they conduct research alongside NIH mentors.
- Postbaccalaureate programs are available for about 700 recent college graduates (16 are members of the NIH Academy, a postbac program focused on domestic health disparities) looking to experience full-time research for a year or two while they apply to graduate or professional school. "The postbac experience is highly valued by graduate and professional schools," says Sokolove, "and our postbacs are getting into terrific programs. They take with them insights into how research works and their own career goals that should help them succeed in their studies."
- About 500 graduate students are accepted to the Graduate Partnerships Program (GPP). They conduct their dissertation research at NIH and receive degrees from their home campuses.

- Approximately 3,800 individuals (60% from outside the United States) with fewer than five years of relevant research experience since the receipt of their doctoral degrees are conducting postdoctoral research in basic, translational, and clinical disciplines in the IRP.

Extra assistance for postdocs. "The 2003 Sigma Xi postdoc survey 'Doctors without Orders' found that postdoc success, measured by numbers of publications and absence of postdoctoral conflict, was correlated with only two factors," says Sokolove, "a structured postdoctoral program and taking advantage of career/professional development programming." The OITE has created the Office of Postdoctoral Services, which recommends completion of Individual Development Plans for each trainee. "Our postdocs are finding positions, even in the tight economy, as science writers, policy analysts, faculty members in universities in the U.S. and overseas, and government employees," she says.

Professional development. The OITE also hosts a plethora of career development programs to support IRP trainees. Orientations and professional development workshops covering language skills for foreign fellows, leadership and management skills, teaching, grant



Sokolove and Casey Kinnally

writing, science writing, and job search strategies help trainees get the most out of their NIH experience. The Career Services Center offers advice for recent grads on getting into graduate and professional school, and assistance with the job search for postdocs. The Office of Postdoctoral Services in the OITE, in collaboration



with the NIH Fellows Committee organizes a Career Symposium, which “encourages our trainees to explore all the options available to science PhDs,” says Sokolove. “A Graduate & Professional School Fair ... enables institutions from across the U.S. to recruit our postbacs and summer interns.”

Biophysicists can look to the NIH for much more than its extramural program. “The NIH interprets the term ‘biomedical research’ broadly,” Sokolove says. “The NIH brings biologists together with physicists, mathematical modelers, computational biologists, chemists, engineers and behavioral scientists to move its agenda forward.” This big-picture view underpins one of the NIH’s lofty goals: using basic knowledge to extend healthy life and reduce disease and disability. “Biophysicists with links to other countries should also understand that

the NIH interprets this goal globally,” says Sokolove.

Biophysicists interested in translational or clinically-related research are especially encouraged to consider the NIH. The new Clinical Research Center was built with labs adjacent to patient care areas. “Clinical concerns are part of everyday life in the NIH IRP,” says Sokolove. “Our *Demystifying Medicine* course will help you master the vocabulary you need to communicate with clinical investigators.”

If you are a student/trainee outside the NIH, you can also look to the OITE for career development assistance. The OITE website, www.training.nih.gov, is full of video- and podcast-accessible workshops, links to a long list of resources (including all of the OITE’s publications), and an insightful careers blog. “By far the most rewarding aspect of the work we do in OITE is seeing our trainees succeed,” Sokolove says; career success for trainees both inside and outside the NIH begins at the OITE website.

The OITE is able to offer a variety of career and professional development services because it has the full support of the NIH behind it. “The NIH administration is firmly committed to the training mission of the NIH,” Sokolove says. “The OITE has been able to expand its staff, boost outreach to minority scientists and the community college population, and provide new services to the extramural community.

“Many biophysicists have already found a home at the NIH,” says Sokolove. For more information, visit the OITE website at www.training.nih.gov.

Looking for a Job?

Check out the Society Job Board for the latest jobs in biophysics!

www.biophysics.org