Meet the New Postdoc Office Director: 
Dr. Bruce Mandt

Who is he?
Originally from Wisconsin, Bruce obtained his B.A. in Psychology in 2004. He studied with Dr. Nancy Zahniser in the Pharmacology Department at the Anschutz Medical Campus. After graduating with Ph.D. in 2009, he became a postdoc in the Psychology Department on the Denver campus. Originally, he was aiming for a PI position.

Turning point: While he was a postdoc, a tenure track position opened up in his Department. He already knew people, had been teaching in the Department and had a decent publication record. Although he thought he was positioned well to be competitive for the job, reality hit him hard—he didn't even get a phone interview. He later found out that the final candidates already had their own funding and an average of 25+ publications.

Facing this, Bruce eventually realized that his passion lies in helping others. Now, Bruce is dedicated to helping graduate students and postdocs identify and pursue their future career paths. He says, “I don’t want to start the conversation of what you want to do at the end of your postdoc career.” Instead, Bruce encourages you to meet with him, talk to your mentor, and use the training resources available on campus to address the ‘what’s next?’ question from day one of your tenure as a postdoc.

Bruce plans to create opportunities for postdocs to practice “non-bench” skills such as establishing networks and identifying specific components required for a given career path. He has already improved the postdoc office website, increased communication between the various postdoc associated groups on campus, and is working hard to increase awareness in the Anschutz community that postdoc trainees’ success sometimes depends on being away from bench.

With his academic training and experience at both the Denver and Anschutz Medical Campus, he is going to be a great personal resource for both postdocs and graduate students. Welcome Bruce, and we look forward to seeing you around!

Book Review: The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks, by Rebecca Skloot

For many of us, human tissue culture is something we deal with every day: splitting, changing media, transfecting, etc. However, it’s not every day that we think of where those cells came from, especially what kind of life the donors lived. This book reveals where scientists isolated HeLa cells, the first human cultured cells, and the events that led to the development of the HeLa cell line. More importantly, the author takes you through the journey of who Henrietta Lacks was, the person to whom HeLa cells belonged.

The author highlights how tissue culture has contributed to many scientific and medical advancements. For example, the first polio vaccine was developed using HeLa cells. Along with the bright side of tissue culture, the book also shows how the scientific community has improved the way science handles the ethical issues surrounding human derived samples. This includes the dark historical mistakes scientists and medical doctors have made.

While those mistakes were not forgettable or forgivable, it is unfortunate that scientist and doctors were still perceived like Dr. Moreau from the H. G. Wells novel: heartless and evil. It is also somewhat depressing to read about U.S. citizens who have absolutely no idea about cells or DNA.

Overall, a scientific audience will realize just how much we take tissue culture for granted and appreciate how far we have come, but it can be frustrating at times to read through misrepresentation and misunderstanding of the community we so proudly live in.

Contributed by
Chiharu Graybill, PhD

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Directing Your Career
An interview with Lora Wilson, Field Medical Director in Oncology for Pfizer

Lora Wilson, Ph.D. (above), was both a graduate student and Postdoctoral Fellow at CU Denver before beginning her career as a Field Medical Director in 2014. I spoke with Lora about her job and how she shaped her career path in industry.

**Contributed by Sarah E. Clark, PhD**

Lora realized academia wasn’t her ideal career track early into her scientific training. She did enjoy, however, the parts that involved discussing research, giving presentations, and contributing feedback. Based on these interests, her mentors suggested Medical Science Liaison (MSL) positions. While the term ‘MSL’ isn’t always used, many large pharmaceutical companies have similar positions, such as Director of Clinical Specialists, or in the case of Pfizer, Field Medical Director.

Importantly, Lora followed-up on her career goals. After defending her thesis, she took time to teach at a community college before starting her postdoc. Then, during her postdoc, she shadowed clinicians in order to gain the clinical experience required for the type of position she was interested in.

The purpose of her position, from Pfizer’s end, is to ensure that oncologists have all the resources and options available to treat patients with their products. Now, Lora’s job is to interface with oncologists, including clinicians who do research, pathologists, research coordinators, and managers of academic labs looking to use Pfizer’s drugs for research projects to ensure safe and effective use.

Lora made clear the distinction between her job and that of sales teams. Rather than being responsible for drug promotion, Field Medical Directors are there to discuss the science behind the drug, including usage in clinical trials, alternative dosing schedules, management of adverse events, and applications for research proposals.

Another separation between Lora’s work and many other jobs in industry is her schedule. As a Field Medical Director, she covers four different states, but the main focus is in Denver, where she works from a home office and sets her own schedule.

In thinking about your own scientific career path, there’s a lesson from Lora’s approach: follow your passion and identify the training you’ll need to get there.

Life Science Industry Showcase

As a prelude to Rocky Mountain Biotechnology Symposium (RMBTS) on April 28, Academia Industry Alliance (AIA) hosted a networking event, the Life Science Industry Showcase. Hundreds of attendees, not only from AMC but also from CUS, interacted with 19 local companies in various scientific fields. This event provided an excellent opportunity with mutual benefits. Prospective job seekers could directly interact with potential employers to get their questions answered. On the other hand, companies were exposed to a highly accomplished sea of talent to choose from.

This was an ideal platform for networking because of two main reasons. First, recruiters and prospective employees connected with each other. Second, some former CU alumni attended as representatives of their companies. They served as valuable informational and inspirational resources to present job-seeking CU students and postdocs.

This 3-hour event was an abridged version of the day-long RMBTS, which will be attended by many more industries. In addition to having booths, they will be presenting talks and posters. Registered attendees will enjoy lunch and an evening reception. In summary, the event sounds ideal for both job seekers and recruiters, as well as, for networking opportunities, collaboration and information on industrial scientific research.

**Contributed by Rwik Sen, PhD**

Event Highlight
Come to the 2nd annual Rocky Mountain Biotechnology Symposium to learn more about our local bioscience industry and to network with Colorado industry professionals. Details at: [http://bit.ly/1q9T05x](http://bit.ly/1q9T05x)

4/27/16
UCD-PDA Coffee Hour 2 pm, RC-1 North, Rm 6107

4/29/16
BEST Program Peer Network Meet-and-greet with student and postdoc organization leaders

Association of International Researchers (AIR) International Dance Day

5/9/16
PDA monthly meeting 4 pm

5/19/16
Women in STEM panel on family panning and parenting in your scientific career

For a full event calendar visit the Postdoc Office website
What’s in a name? (or badge designation)

Our ID badges recently changed from “staff” to “postdoctoral fellow”. How our badge identifies us is prompting discussion about our role and status on campus as postdocs. Here two postdocs at CU Denver share their thoughts on this issue.

Opinion #1:

Postdoctoral fellows should have their own separate badge designation for multiple reasons. First, it will identify postdocs as a separate group of employees that are mentored trainees with a terminal degree, with different roles and benefits than most employees that hold the “Staff” designation. Second, it will help postdocs identify each other in group settings, which will help with the cohesiveness of the postdoc community as a whole and allow us to feel like part of a group. Third, a separate badge designation will make us more visible to the University community overall, which will give us more leverage to enact change in University policies as they pertain to postdocs and other trainees. Overall, the time spent as postdoctoral fellows can be one where we feel invisible and transitional, and having something as simple as a separate badge designation will recognize us as an integral and identifiable part of the University research community.

Opinion #2:

Until the question presented itself, I never thought about my badge designation. Yes, the red ‘staff’ designation didn’t communicate much about my position, but it isn’t something that bothered me. Instead, I’m more concerned with the badge designations for postdocs who are promoted (or ‘timed-out’) of their position and move into the grey zone of research associate or instructor. Postdoctoral fellows are by their nature in a transient position, and rather than focus on what my badge says now, I’m interested in what my badge (here or elsewhere) will be after this.

Ask A (Post) Doc

Question:

What are some tips for choosing a postdoc?

Answer:

Tip #1:
Choosing a postdoc can seem overwhelming at first. To start, consider the best science fit for you. It may be time to expand your research expertise to a new area. This will build your skills and knowledge base, but will also be more challenging the further you stray from your graduate work.

Tip #2:
Be careful about choosing a mentor. Think about your career goals and priorities, and try to find a mentor that will support them. For example, if you want to teach in the future, consider how you would begin that training during your postdoc.

Tip #3:
To narrow things down, also consider location: what cities could you see yourself living in, and what ones are off the table?

Tip #4:
Ask around! Your mentor and other professors in your department are a great resource for suggesting labs and giving you the inside scoop on the reputation and even personality of the mentor you’re considering.

When you get an interview, you typically only have one day to assess how you like the mentor and the rest of the lab, so prepare questions ahead of time and make the most of your visit.

Have a question? Reaction? Send it in and start the discussion!

Email: sarah.e.clark@ucdenver.edu or chiharu.graybill@ucdenver.edu
In the Theodosescu lab at UCD, we study the biology of bladder cancer. In particular, my project focuses on the role of an enzyme called amylo-α-1,6-glucosidase-4-α-glucanotransferase (AGL) in bladder cancer. AGL has an well-characterized role in glycogen metabolism, but was not known to be involved in cancer until our lab showed its role as a growth suppressor in bladder tumors (Guin et al., 2014). To investigate how AGL is involved in carcinogenesis in non-cancer bladder tissue we established a collaboration with Dr. Comi at the Dino Ferrari Center at the University of Milan in Milan, Italy.

The Comi lab has created AGL knockout mice. However, because laboratory animals are difficult to ship, particularly internationally, I decided to perform several preliminary experiments with these mice at the Comi Laboratory in Milan. Fortunately, I was selected for the international visiting scientist through the BEST program award, which covered my travel expenses and accommodations in Italy.

This collaboration was beneficial both professionally and personally. Professionally, it was much more difficult to work efficiently in a place where not only the building and equipment, but also the language and culture are different. However, it was rewarding to accomplish a goal despite of these obstacles.

Personally, I had a once-in-a-lifetime cultural experience that many early career scientists are not afforded. I previously traveled and spoke Italian conversationally, but I strengthened my skills and also learned a lot about Italian culture that I did not know previously. For example, it is frowned upon to drink cappuccino after noon. Espresso, however, is fine any time of day.

I’m thankful that I had this opportunity, and thank the graduate school for providing it to me. From this experience I not only gained knowledge about how science is conducted outside of the United States, but also was able to establish a fruitful collaboration with Dr. Comi’s research group– without this award, it may not have been possible!

Contributed by
Carolyn R. Lew, PhD