

## **Leveraging the Postdoc Experience: Strategies for Determining Your Next Steps**

**VPA Seminar, 10/10/18, Advice from our postdoc panelists**

**Christopher T. Smith, Ph.D.**

**5<sup>th</sup>-year Postdoc in Psychology (Neuroscience)**

My career advice is to keep one's options open. Even if you think you want to pursue a faculty position, you should look at a few alternative careers. Talk to people working in a variety of areas to see how the hard and soft skills you developed in your Ph.D. and postdoctoral training can translate to the "real world." You may discover career paths that you didn't previously know were available.

There is nothing worse than getting to the end of your postdoc and having no career prospects. I will admit that balancing the application process when one takes this approach is tricky as an academic faculty position application timeline is quite different than that for other positions. However, I have personally found it very freeing to see that there are other careers I could use my skills and interests in beyond that of a faculty member. I realize I don't have to land a tenure-track faculty job to be happy or a "success."

I will be blogging about my career search experience over the next few months via the [NIH BEST PhD/Postdoc Blog](#).

Feel free to reach out to me via email at [christopher.t.smith@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:christopher.t.smith@vanderbilt.edu) or connect with me via [LinkedIn](#). Happy to answer questions and provide advice when I can.

**Robert W. Gould, Ph.D.**

**Research Instructor in Pharmacology**

Communication is key (in many different forms). Networking is incredibly important. Challenge yourself to meet new people outside of your current laboratory or Department and to keep in touch (even via text) with old mentors and lab members. Expand your web of supporters to help you locate and recommend you for positions that otherwise would not have been discovered. Equally, challenge yourself to get feedback from multiple sources at all levels and backgrounds of science. Everyone has a different perspective on what works—listen to those perspectives and then decide what will work best for you (career path, grant template, etc). Social media (across many venues) is becoming an increasingly important tool for disseminating and seeking information—learn to use at least some of it (and then teach me)!

Feel free to reach out to me at [robert.w.gould@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:robert.w.gould@vanderbilt.edu) if I can help answer any other questions or share my ongoing experience.

**Jessica M. Overstreet, Ph.D.**

**3<sup>rd</sup>-year Postdoctoral Fellow (Nephrology and MPB) Funded by the Lilly Innovation Fellowship Award Research Scientist, Diabetic Complications: CardioRenal at Eli Lilly & Company**

As a postdoctoral fellow, you are at an exciting, yet sometimes scary, time to design the career path you envision for yourself. Understanding what motivates you and the skillset you want to develop is key to advancing professionally and personally toward your goals. The BRET office is a tremendous resource of career development seminars and programs that can help you develop your skillset and prepare (and empower!) you for the job market. It will take extra effort, but career development is equally important as publications. Network early and often and stay in touch with those who you establish a genuine connection with. Creating a peer network can serve as a support system. Step out of your comfort zone. We are all unique and have value to give to this world so share your value confidently and audaciously. Lastly, relax and enjoy the journey! Contact me at [Jessica.m.overstreet@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:Jessica.m.overstreet@vanderbilt.edu) (work) or [Jessica.m.overstreet@gmail.com](mailto:Jessica.m.overstreet@gmail.com) (personal) and connect with me on Linked at Jessica M Overstreet, Ph.D.. I look forward to sharing my experiences and answering any questions.

**Carl E. Darris, Ph.D.**

**Research Assistant Professor (Nephrology)**

As young scientists, we all face some level of uncertainty about different aspects of our abilities. Often times we let these uncertainties prevent us from taking advantage of opportunities outside of our comfort zone. More importantly, these latent concerns are often visible during our day to day interactions with others. We all know that we should be intentional about the message sent during interviews, but it is just as important to be intentional while networking, performing experiments, and walking up and down the halls of your department. Most jobs come by way of referral, which means before you enter the interview room you'll probably have to impress someone that you may not even know is watching you. I recommend taking stock of your strengths and weaknesses and being deliberate about sharing your confidence in your strengths. Be the President of your fan club.

Feel free to contact me at [carldarris@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:carldarris@vanderbilt.edu)