

The NICHD Connection

November 2012

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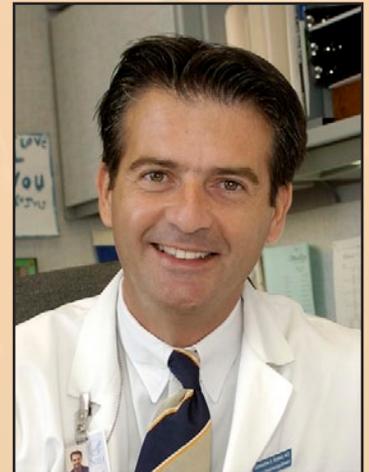
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Thoughts of a Postbac: An Interview with Dr. Constantine Stratakis

By Jeffrey Head

As a postbac, it is often hard not to feel like your life currently rests in a state of limbo with a large number of important questions weighing on your conscience, each with a seemingly endless number of equally viable answers: M.D., Ph.D. or both? Which institution is best fit to achieve my goals? Which subject, problem, or system do I inevitably want to devote my entire life to understanding? Will I succeed? But in the midst of this deluge of uncertainty we can gain insight from those who have come before us and have carried out their respective missions with such tenacity that they hold the positions they currently do and garner the respect from entire fields of research and medicine. In search of such advice I decided it would be most beneficial to go straight to the top.



Constantine Stratakis, MD, D(med)Sci

Dr. Stratakis is currently the Scientific Director of the NICHD and has earned an impressive number of awards and accolades in his lifetime, which would quite frankly be too numerous to list here (his full bio can be found on the [NICHD website](#)). However, he credits much of his success to the mentors who provided him with the guidance and opportunity to become independent in his research. In his eyes, nothing is more important to the career of a scientist, doctor, or both than choosing the right mentors and making a concerted effort to be friendly to the people who surround you. Almost every mentor or coworker of Dr. Stratakis is either currently one of his collaborators, or their trainees, or has assisted him in the past in a number of his monumental discoveries, at one point even serving as the best man at his wedding.

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Letter from the Editor

I'm excited to present this month's postbac-themed issue. Often our newsletter has focused on workshops and career advice for grad students and postdoctoral fellows. Postbacs, however, also stand at a pivotal point in their training. The newsletter is an ideal place for our postbac fellows to share their ideas, frustrations, and achievements as they carve out their own unique career paths.

In honor of our postbac-packed issue, NICHD postbac Jeffrey Head begins a new column, "Thoughts of a Postbac." In his first installment, Jeffrey shares his interview with Dr. Constantine Stratakis about mentoring and career decisions for those in their early careers.

This month we also introduce our two new NICHD Postbac reps, Carla Lopez and

Rocco "Rocky" Ferrandino, as well as this year's NICHD Scholars in the Developing Talent Program, MD/PhD students Ashleigh Bouchelion and Dezmond Taylor-Douglas. Finally, we take a look at what some of NICHD's postbacs have to say about "Becoming an Effective Scientist," the 11-week postbac-focused course, currently in session.

The NICHD Connection looks forward to incorporating more coverage of events and topics relevant to the postbac community and all of our NICHD fellows!

Your Editor in Chief,
Shana R. Spindler, PhD

Questions, comments, concerns? Please send an email to Shana.Spindler@gmail.com. We take your input seriously!

Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor,

This letter is in response to the article in last month's newsletter on the teaching collaboration between NICHD and the University of Maryland ILS program. As a participant in the workshop I feel this was a great opportunity to learn about the current techniques used by successful educators in the classroom. The most helpful part of the workshop was learning to use the CREATE method where the students are encouraged to think critically and deeply about a topic and design the next experiment in a particular study. I looked forward to every session of the workshop as Dr. Boots [Quimby] made them very interactive and lively, with plenty of hands-on activity to practice the methods we were learning about. I hope this workshop is offered in the future for NICHD fellows.

Sincerely,
Payal Ray

Thoughts of a Postbac: An Interview with Dr. Constantine Stratakis (continued from page 1)

Although Dr. Stratakis is a firm believer that there is no simple “cookie” of advice that can uniformly guide every prospective M.D. or Ph.D. through this difficult transition in life, perhaps his greatest piece of wisdom is to remain humble. Remembering that there is always someone out there who is, “smarter, more successful, and better looking than you are,” allows for possibly the greatest success of all in science and medicine: the freedom to follow your true passions without becoming consumed by some arbitrary idea of “success.” When asked why he has consistently turned down more lucrative careers outside of the NIH, Dr. Stratakis responded simply by saying, “I don’t

call this work. The NIH is the best place for me to be: I actually get paid to do what I love!”

In the ensuing months and years we postbacs will face a veritable onslaught of questions and decisions that will likely determine the course of the rest of our lives. As Dr. Stratakis has pointed out, no one piece of advice can guide us in addressing these difficult problems. Yet, if we focus our attention on choosing the right mentors and maintaining our sense of humility instead of on the prestige and wealth associated with a particular degree or institution, we can achieve success – whatever that means to you – in any path we chose.

The NICHD Scholars Developing Talent Program

The NICHD Scholars Developing Talent Program is now in its second year. Established in 2011, the program exposes young trainees to Division of Intramural Research activities, committees, retreats, forums, and workshops on team science, management, and grant writing. Each Scholar also has the opportunity to work in an NICHD lab, contributing to the lab’s research initiative.

“The NICHD Developing Talent program is a program that is dedicated to the training and support of a diverse cohort of individuals from various backgrounds,” said Dezmond Taylor-Douglas, current NICHD Scholar. Dezmond began his research at the NICHD with Dr. Jack Yanovski in May. Already, he has received guidance about professional development and careers through seminars, workshops, and experiences with other

medical professionals.

Ashleigh Bouchelion joins Dezmond as the second new member of the NICHD Scholar program this year. Both Ashleigh and Dezmond are MD/PhD students at the Howard University College of Medicine. “I think this program is a huge stepping stone toward the direction of attaining an MD/PhD and being a prolific investigator,” said Ashleigh.

Not all NICHD Scholars, however, are already in an MD/PhD or PhD program. The 2011 NICHD Scholars, Carla Lopez and Chinedu Anyaeji, were selected from the NIH Academy postbaccalaureate program. Carla is currently continuing her second year as a postbac in the McBain lab.*

Regardless of academic title, the NICHD

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The NICHD Scholars Developing Talent Program

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Scholars Developing Talent Program gives participants a unique opportunity to individualize goals. Dezmond, for example, is searching for a research focus and is excited that the NICHD can expose him to studies on various clinical diseases that affect our society.

Asheigh's main goal concentrates on personal development. "I hope that I can continue to perfect my basic science training in addition to acquiring better critical thinking skills," said Asheigh. She is hoping the program will teach her how to develop a project and think through the critical processes of study design, grant writing, and publishing so that she can one day pioneer her own research.

If you would like to learn more about the NICHD Scholars Developing Talent Program, please contact Brenda Hanning at hanningb@mail.nih.gov.

*Editor's Note: Carla Lopez is also one of our new postbac reps, along with Rocco Ferrandino. Check out their bios on [page 5](#).



New Scholar Stats

Dezmond Taylor-Douglas

TITLE: Third year MD/PhD student, Howard University College of Medicine

UNDERGRAD: Morehouse College, Atlanta, GA

SPECIALTY

INTERESTS: Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

HOBBIES: Running marathons

NICHD Advisor: Jack Yanovski, MD, PhD

PROJECT SUBJECT: Characterization of the Melanocortin-3-receptor and its role in the development of obesity and other metabolic syndromes.



Ashleigh Bouchelion

TITLE: Third year MD/PhD student, Howard University College of Medicine

UNDERGRAD: University of Maryland, Baltimore County

SPECIALTY

INTERESTS: Fertility studies

HOBBIES: Traveling, skiing, watching movies, reading, engaging in new and exciting activities, meeting new people, spending time with her four younger siblings, family, and friends, and remaining an active member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority.

NICHD ADVISOR: Anil Mukherjee, MD, PhD

PROJECT SUBJECT: Using the PPT1 knockout mouse to better understand the molecular mechanisms underlying a group of hereditary childhood neurodegenerative lysosomal storage disorders



Meet our new NICHD Postbac Reps

The NICHD Connection would like to introduce NICHD's new postbac IC representatives, Carla M. Lopez and Rocco Ferrandino. Postbac IC reps serve on the NIH-wide Pre-IRTA Committee on behalf of the institute's postbac fellow population. They also work closely with the Office of Education to plan events of interest to the postbacs, whether academic or social. NICHD currently has about 40 postbacs who are conducting both clinical and basic science research.

MEET CARLA M. LOPEZ:

I am a graduate of Wellesley College where I majored in Cognitive and Linguistic Sciences. I came to the NIH initially as a member of the NIH Academy, a fellowship program dedicated to the elimination of health disparities. Shortly thereafter I received

support from the NICHD Developing Talent Scholars Program and began working in the lab of Dr. Chris McBain, where I currently study neurogenesis and the plasticity of neurons in the adult brain. I also work in the NICHD peds clinic, shadowing Dr. Raygada, Dr. Rennert, and Dr. Stratakis, all of whom are gifted physicians as well as wonderful, dedicated

teachers and mentors. I love every minute of what I do in the clinic and the lab. I am incredibly grateful for all the experiences and opportunities afforded to me by NICHD, and as postbac rep, my goal is to make the NICHD experience as meaningful and enriching as possible for every postbac. Rocky Ferrandino and I coordinate service learning and academic enrichment activities, including the ExploreINN Program at the Children's Inn, Genetics Clinic, and volunteer work with Learning Ally [the on-campus studio that records scientific texts for students with visual or learning challenges]. I greatly enjoy serving the NICHD postbac community and am more than happy to take questions, comments and suggestions for future postbac activities. I may be reached at Carla.Lopez@nih.gov.

MEET ROCCO FERRANDINO:

I grew up in Los Angeles, California where I was an avid surfer and science enthusiast but made my way to the east coast in search of new waves and higher education at Georgetown University where I studied Biology of Global Health. With limited access to the distraction of any nearby ocean, my love for science blossomed as I engaged in cell biology research as a Beckman



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Meet our new NICHD Postbac Reps *(continued from page 5)*

Scholar at Georgetown. Following graduation, I leapt at the opportunity to strengthen my quantitative reasoning skills in the biophysics lab of Dr. Donald Rau. Currently, my project focuses on characterizing conformational changes associated with magnesium binding to a restriction endonuclease by probing with osmotic stress. As a postbac representative, I make every effort to enhance the postbac experience in the NICHD by facilitating access to some of the unique clinical resources and service opportunities available in the NICHD, such as the NICHD's pediatric genetics clinic and the NIH Children's Inn. I have thoroughly enjoyed working in the Rau lab, learning from Drs. Raygada, Rennert, and Stratakis in the Genetics Clinic, and helping my fellow postbacs make the most of their NICHD experience. I can be reached at Rocco.Ferrandino@nih.gov.

Becoming an Effective Scientist, Only a Few More Sessions Left!

"Becoming an Effective Scientist" is an 11-week seminar series for postbac trainees. The course is completely voluntary and invites postbacs from NICHD, but also includes postbacs from other institutes.

The seminars run over lunchtime on Mondays, 12-1:30 PM, in the Clinical Center. The intent is to create a small-group, comfortable environment that helps to perfect analytical skills while expanding knowledge of experimental techniques.

Postdoc and clinical instructors will pick a paper related to the week's topic and following the introduction, students will discuss and critique some aspect of the paper together, such as focusing on a problematic figure. Some topics for this year's course include: inflammation and diabetes, genomic engineering, in vivo imaging, surgery for obesity, and epigenetics and development.

If you would like to join the class, please email Kevin Francis at franciskr@mail.nih.gov. Pizza will be provided! Participation is not restricted to NICHD. If you know of a postbac friend in another institute who would be interested, please let Kevin know. The group is kept to around 20, which allows for good discussion.

A couple comments about the course so far:

"It's a great way to practice important skills [you need as a scientist] while learning about topics outside your own field and meeting postbacs from other institutes."

"The instructor was great and got everyone in the class to participate, thinking critically about the topic, figures and implications of the research presented."

November Announcements

SAVE THE DATE: DEC 5, NICHD 50TH ANNIVERSARY SCIENTIFIC COLLOQUIUM

Please save the date for a special scientific colloquium this December 5th, in honor of NICHD's 50th anniversary. The event will take place in the NIH Clinical Center's Masur Auditorium from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., and feature outstanding speakers from a variety of disciplines who will reflect on past accomplishments and anticipate future opportunities in research and health care. A reception will follow in the Clinical Center atrium.

This event is open to the public, so please feel free to spread the word. More information will be forthcoming next month. Should you have any questions in the meantime, contact Katie Rush at katie.rush@nih.gov or 301.402.2205.

We look forward to celebrating with you this December!
—NICHD's 50th Anniversary Planning Committee



GPP RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM ABSTRACTS DUE NOVEMBER 9!

The 9th Annual NIH Graduate Student Research Symposium will be held on Tuesday, January 15, 2013 at Natcher Conference Center, Bethesda campus. This daylong event includes student talks, poster presentations (which includes a competition to win travel awards), a keynote address, presentation of the 2013 Outstanding Mentor Awards, and the annual GPP graduation ceremony. All graduate students performing their doctoral dissertation research at NIH are eligible and encouraged to participate (500-word abstracts). The "New Proposal" poster category will return for those in the early stages of a project. All poster presenters are eligible to compete for the NIH Graduate Student Research Awards (NGSRAs, travel awards). To submit an abstract, please visit <https://www.training.nih.gov/gsc/symposium/9th/abstract>.

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November Announcements

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NIH ERA ESUBMISSION ITEMS OF INTEREST

A message from Joe Schumaker, eRA Commons, Division of Communications and Outreach:

As a former educator who spent 15 years teaching folks about various technology solutions, I am a firm believer that training and education are keys to success. To help you achieve success, we have developed a new **eRA Training page**. The eRA Training page consolidates resources from various locations across the eRA website into one unified page that provides access to resources for eRA Commons, Internet Assisted Review (IAR), and xTrain for starters.

Clicking on each icon gives you access to PowerPoint presentations, Web-based tutorials, Quick Reference Sheets, Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) and other information that was previously located throughout the **eRA website**. You can also get to the training page directly from the right navigation panel of the eRA website.

These changes are designed to get you to these resources quickly and easily. Please check out the pages. Who knows, maybe you will find something helpful you haven't seen before!

November Events

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 27TH, NOON-1 PM

A "Lunch and Chat" Session with Drs. Payal Ray and Mithun Mitra
FAES: Public Health & Tech Transfer Certificates

Have you ever thought of pursuing advanced education as a postdoc here at NIH?

The Office of Education is offering a brown bag lunch session with two of our very own postdoc fellows who are currently enrolled in FAES certificate programs. This is a great opportunity for you to learn about career options in technology transfer and public health as they discuss with you why they decided to seek advanced studies and how they fit the coursework demands into their postdoc lives.

If you are interested, sign up soon by sending Yvette Pittman (pittmanyv@mail.nih.gov) an email.

Don't forget to check out upcoming events hosted by the NIH OITE at <https://www.training.nih.gov/events/upcoming>.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 29, 3 PM

NIH Science education conversation series

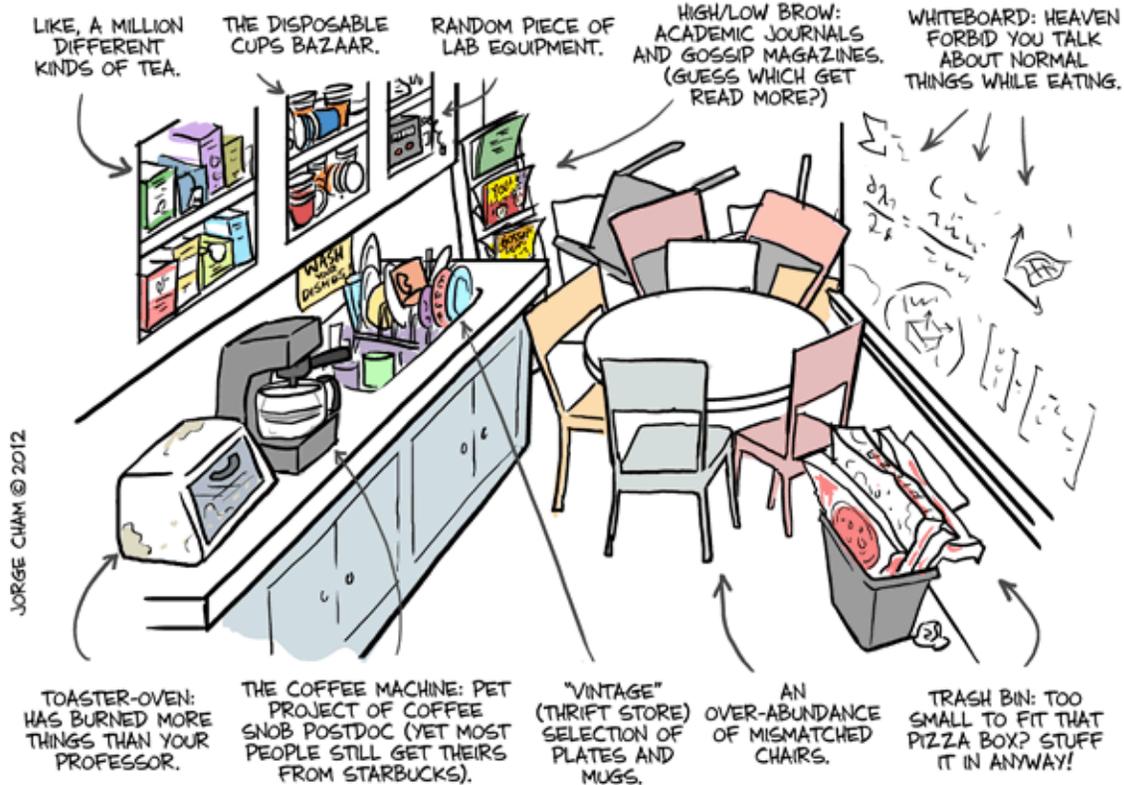
Bringing Underrepresented Populations into the Sciences: What Difference Does Difference Make?

Shirley Malcom, Head, Education and Human Resources, American Association for the Advancement of Science

Building 50, Room 1328/1334, NIH Main Campus, Bethesda, MD

THE LAB/OFFICE BREAK ROOM

KEEP IT CLEAN OR INCUR THE WRATH OF THE OFFICE ADMINISTRATOR!



<http://www.phdcomics.com/comics/archive.php?comid=1528>

Note: Look at this comic and then visit Building 6B, third floor lunch area. Get ready to laugh!

