

# The NICHD Connection

## November 2013

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## NICHD Mock Study Section/Grant Review Recap

By *Stephanie Cologna, PhD*

The NICHD Division of Extramural Research and the Office of Education partnered in mid-September to hold a Mock Study Section and Grant Review panel for fellows. This outstanding activity provided insight into grant review, from submission to decision, and outlined which people to contact during the process.

### THE SUBMISSION AND REVIEW PROCESS

Prior to proposal submission, you are encouraged to speak with Program Officers to discuss your scientific interests and proposed research. A Program Officer is an extramural official who advises grant applicants, and at the initial stages of writing the proposal, they offer guidance on selecting a given institute or group of reviewers, called a study section. It is important that your grant proposal “fits” with the institute’s mission. They can also answer specific questions related to the program announcement for a particular grant. You can find a Program Officer by consulting with your colleagues, navigating each institute’s webpage, or by looking under the contact information for a specific Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA).

Grants are submitted through [grants.gov](http://grants.gov). As a fellow at the NIH, you should work with the NICHD Office of Education for proposal submission. As you transition into new positions, your new academic institution will have an office to assist you.

Once submitted, the Scientific Review Officer (SRO) should be your next contact person. The SRO is responsible for the initial peer review of your submission. This person organizes the study section, carries out study section review meetings, and prepares summary statements. The study section can be made up of 20 to 40 established scientists who review the submitted grant proposals. Not all members participate in every study section meeting. Typically a mix of standing members and ad hoc members are involved.

The SRO is responsible for assigning three primary reviewers to each grant submission. Based upon their initial review, a preliminary score is collected, and depending on this score the grant may or may not be discussed during the actual study section review. If discussed, the primary reviewers will give a brief summary and point out details of the application. The chair will open up discussion for all panel members. Then a final summary by the chair will be

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## Letter from the Editor

Now that your experiments are, hopefully, back in full swing from the shutdown, let's shift focus to a little career development and training. Three of our NICHD fellows have written informative pieces for this month's issue of *The NICHD Connection*.

Postdoctoral fellow Dr. Stephanie Cologna **recaps the Grant Review/Mock Study Section workshop** from mid-September. She describes, in detail, proposal submission and review as well as the various individuals who serve as contact points during each step of the granting process. Dr. Cologna also lists several hints from the mock study section and additional reading material that you might find useful.

Also for fellows who are writing a proposal—or scientific publication, job application, or personal statement—postdoctoral fellow **Dr. Mikolaj J. Sulkowski introduces the NIH Fellows Editorial Board (FEB)**, a valuable editing resource on campus. The FEB is also a great volunteer opportunity for fellows who are interested in an editing career or for those who simply want to polish their editing skills.

Our final article this month reminds us of what it's like to first step foot in a new lab. **In the “Thoughts of a Postbac” column**, our new postbac fellow Uma Srivastava describes her feelings during her first few weeks at the NIH. Her open approach allows us to remember our own experiences as new trainees, which can help shape our mentoring styles as we guide our junior members into a successful career.

I know October was a rough month, but looking forward, I hope you all have a renewed faith that the NIH is a treasured resource for our country. An outcry that the shutdown affected scientific funding was one of the first talking points to hit the media. While it might take a crisis to vocalize it, people care about what you do.

Your Editor in Chief,  
Shana R. Spindler, PhD

Please send your questions, comments, and contributions to **Shana.Spindler@gmail.com**.

## NICHD Mock Study Section/Grant Review Recap (continued from page 1)

provided and each member of the committee can submit a final score, which will be used to calculate the final impact score. The impact scores and summary statements, which were written initially by the primary reviewers, will be provided for the applicant's review.

After scores are released, contacting your Program Officer will allow you to decide how to move forward. **Note:** All formal communications about your grant application at NIH are done through the eRA Commons system, which allows processing from the submission to the closeout of an award.

### THE MOCK STUDY SECTION

Following a brief introduction to the submission and review process, we witnessed a mock study section. During the mock review, we covered several different granting mechanisms, including R03, R01, and K99 grants. In each case, there were typically only one or two people out of the entire panel, which totals about ten people, who were experts in the specific field in which the proposal covered. This is an important point given that all members of the panel score your application. Therefore, you want the three primary reviewers to be excited about your grant as they debrief it to the entire panel.

Other "hints" gleaned from the mock review are:

- » Include a cover letter with your submission. The letter can state your institute requests, study section preference, and the title of the proposal or a brief statement about your application.
- » Familiarize yourself with the different funding mechanisms available through the NIH. The requirements of a small pilot grant such as the R03 are very different from the expectations of an R01 submission.
- » Consider your review audience. Reviewers

are typically faculty who are extremely busy. Therefore, it is important that your entire application is reader-friendly. Be sure that your figures are labeled correctly, not too small, and always on the page with the related text. Reviewers appreciate you leaving white space between paragraphs, and using the recommended margins. Also, references should always be complete and accurate—they do get checked.

If you are considering an academic path, this workshop is a great introduction to the grant submission and review process. For fellows who are considering submitting a K99 application, this activity is highly recommended. Remember that submitting a grant is a time-consuming process. Start early and make sure you talk to the appropriate Program Officer to start off on the right foot!

A special thank you to Program Officers Drs. Susan Taymans and Stuart Moss and Scientific Review Officer Dr. David Weinberg from the NICHD Extramural Program, who led this event, and to our mock study section reviewers: Drs. Jurrien Dean (NIDDK), Janice Evans (Johns Hopkins), James Segars (NICHD), Thomas Miller (NICHD), Kevin Francis (NICHD), and Erin Wolff (NICHD).

For additional reading, please refer to the following sources:

Zatz M. (2011). A view from the NIH bridge: perspectives of a program officer. *Mol. Biol. Cell*, 22(15): 2661-2663. [[PDF](#)]

Bonetta L. (2009). How to Be a Member of an R01 NIH Study Section. Addendum to Making the Right Moves: A Practical Guide to Scientific Management for Postdocs and New Faculty, second edition. Howard Hughes Medical Institute and Burroughs Wellcome Fund. [[PDF](#)]

## Inside the NIH Fellows Editorial Board

By Mikolaj J. Sulkowski, PhD, Senior Editor NIH Fellows Editorial Board



Since its inception in 2002, the NIH Fellows Editorial Board (FEB) has provided fast, free, and confidential editing services on over 750 manuscripts for NIH and FDA clinical and research fellows. You may be wondering, how does the FEB do this work so efficiently? This article aims to provide a glimpse into the operational structure of the FEB to give you a clearer picture of what happens after you submit

a manuscript for editing. For those of you thinking of joining FEB, knowing how the FEB is organized will help you decide if becoming a FEB editor is the right move to hone your writing and editing skills.

The FEB has three tiers of editing positions: Primary Editor, Associate Editor, and Senior Editor. Currently, there are thirty primaries, four associates, and one senior editor. When a manuscript comes in, the Senior Editor assigns it to an associate editor, who solicits three volunteers from among the primary editors to form a team. Each team member critically reads the manuscript and the team meets the following Monday to discuss their critiques.

Following the discussion, each team member prepares two reports: a soft copy and an electronic report (e-report). The soft copy was formerly a hard copy because it was a physical printout of the manuscript marked with the editor's comments. The soft copy is a digital version (.pdf file) of the manuscript annotated by the editors. This report primarily addresses issues

such as grammar, style, and accuracy of the text—basically copy editing. The e-report is a separate document that contains the editor's comments for more substantive changes, including suggestions for content and organization of sentences and paragraphs. The FEB will not evaluate a manuscript's scientific merit or make suggestions about scientific content.

Each week, typically, the primary editors send their reports to one another by Wednesday, and they are combined into compiled reports. The Associate Editor reviews the compiled reports and sends them to the Senior Editor by Friday. The Senior Editor uses these reports to prepare final reports and sends them to the author by the following Tuesday. The entire process takes under ten business days! As we discuss a maximum of three manuscripts per week, primary editors should volunteer at least every other month.

The FEB edits many different types of documents—not only research articles but also personal statements, grant proposals (K99, etc.), job applications, even letters of recommendation. Many FEB-edited articles have been published in high-impact peer-reviewed journals, including *The Journal of Cell Biology*, *Cancer Research*, and *Molecular Cell*. Former FEB members have used their enhanced skill sets to advance in careers in academia, government, and the private sector. So whether you are thinking of submitting a manuscript for editing or joining our team, the FEB presents a unique opportunity at the NIH.

For more information and contact details, please visit <http://ccr.cancer.gov/careers/feb/>.

## Thoughts of a Postbac: Life Post College

By *Uma Srivastava*

Starting a job or fellowship at a new location can be daunting, much more so when it is at the National Institutes of Health. Sometimes it is intimidating for new lab members to express how they are feeling when they first arrive at the NIH. In this “Thoughts of a Postbac” column, I want to share how a junior trainee feels, recently out of college, while the experience is still fresh in my mind. This might help graduate and postdoctoral mentors get a junior trainee off to a running start, as my lab did for me.

Waking up every morning without the fear of missing a quiz or forgetting to submit an assignment is incredible. However, it also brings about a new set of responsibilities. As I was completing my master’s degree at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, I had various options for the next step in life: I could start working at a local research company or I could take the big step and move. I chose to leave the good ole’ South and its southern hospitality for a new chapter at the NIH. I had never visited the NIH before and didn’t even know anyone who worked on campus; I was entering uncharted territory. To say the least, I was apprehensive, frightened, and intimidated.

As I entered the NIH Campus on a bright and early Monday morning, I was overwhelmed by the sheer size and

magnitude of the facilities. Everyone was super focused, walking in with mugs of coffee and reading the morning news on their tablets and iPads. I overheard conversations ranging from science to politics to cultural affairs. Walking into my new lab, I told myself I would take full advantage of every single opportunity that came my way. I told myself I would be open to new ideas and new people. Everyone in my lab greeted me with open arms and gave me a warm welcome.

Settling into a new lab is challenging, not knowing where everything is kept and whose lab bench is where. You want to ask a great deal of questions, but you don’t want to harass or bother other lab members. My biggest fear was finding my way around building 10. The Clinical Research Center (CRC) is massive, and one wrong turn can get you totally lost. Every time I accompany my mentor, Dr. Chris Wassif, for meetings, he takes a new route to the destination (I told him that I would put research on the back burner and create an app for this building!). I quickly



*(continued on page 6)*

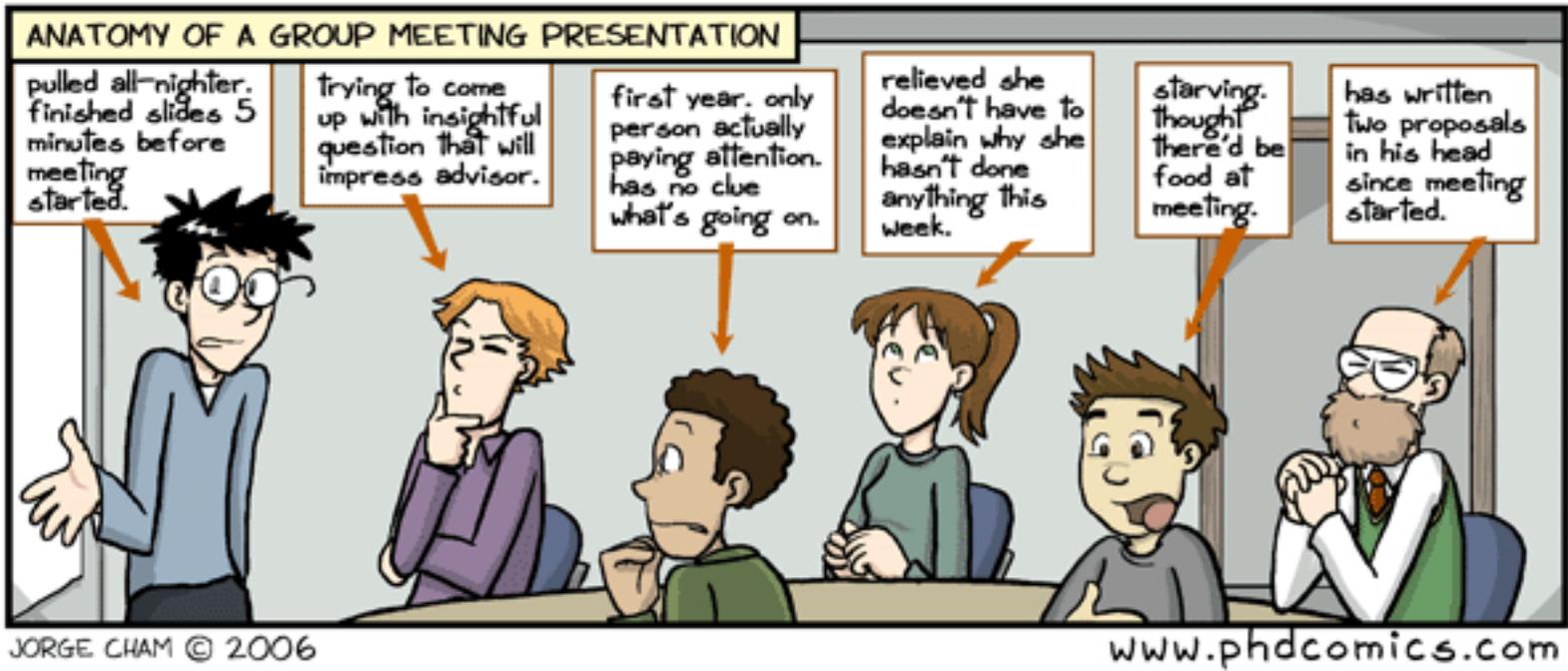
## Thoughts of a Postbac: Life Post College (continued from page 5)

learned and memorized the paths for the few places I needed to go. Apart from that, building 10 is still a mystery and will probably remain one for years to come.

The best part about being at the NIH is the exposure to abundant intellectual and social opportunities. So many unique and interesting lectures take place every week with plenty of other events to meet postbacs like me. Most important, I've enjoyed meeting people from different cultures and ethnicities.

To say the least, my first few weeks have been exciting. I hope to apply my experiences as an NICHD trainee to my future endeavors. Working at the NIH has allowed me to see that science is important and every small and minute experiment does make a difference. Settling into a new location can be a little challenging, but with the right team, a fresh trainee has bright prospects ahead.

Don't forget, you were a "newbie" once too!



<http://www.phdcomics.com/comics/archive.php?comid=719>



## Life Outside Lab

Postdoctoral fellow Dr. Swagata Roychowdhury shot this photo on the NIH campus during the last weekend of October. "I wanted to capture the beauty of the fall colors along with Bldg 10 in the background," wrote Dr. Roychowdhury.

Do you have a photo you'd like to share with the NICHD fellow community? Please email your submissions to [Shana.Spindler@gmail.com](mailto:Shana.Spindler@gmail.com).

## November Announcements

### LET'S GO BOWLING! DECEMBER 3, 5:30 – 7:00

Save the date for the NICHD Fellows Fall Social Event at the Bethesda Naval Bowling Center (directly across from the NIH campus)

\$3.25 per person per game & \$2.50 for Shoe Rentals

Food and Beverages available at the café

If you are up for a challenge, create your bowling team of four intramural fellows! Sign up with Stephanie Cologna at [stephanie.cologna@nih.gov](mailto:stephanie.cologna@nih.gov) by November 29th.

You'll need your NIH ID to enter the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center.



## November Events

### TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 5, 3 – 5 PM

NICHD Exchange: "Contraception: Or Baby Makes 3?"  
Building 31, Room 6C6

Speakers include:

- » *Alicia Armstrong, MD*, Gynecologic Health and Disease Branch:  
"The Unintended Consequences of Unintended Pregnancy"
- » *Susan Newcomer, PhD*, Population Dynamics Branch:  
"The 37%: Understanding Why So Many Pregnancies in the U.S. Are Mistimed, Unintended, Unplanned, and/or Unwanted"
- » *Lisa Kaeser, JD*, Office of Legislation and Public Policy (OLPP):  
"Perfectly Legal... Except When It's Not"
- » *Diana Blithe, PhD*, Contraceptive Discovery and Development Branch:  
"Contraceptive Development: Successes from the Past and Challenges for the Future"

### FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 8, 10 AM – 12 NOON

Job Interviewing Skills Workshop, for senior fellows  
(previously scheduled for October 23)  
with public speaking coach Scott Morgan.

Limited spots left! Please register with Yvette Pittman at [yvette.pittman@nih.gov](mailto:yvette.pittman@nih.gov).

### TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 12TH, 10 AM – 12 NOON

Graphics Workshop (previously scheduled for October 1)

Limited spots left! To register, email Yvette Pittman at [yvette.pittman@nih.gov](mailto:yvette.pittman@nih.gov).

### WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 12 NOON

"Lunch and Chat Session: Preparing for Consulting Careers"  
with Diane Epperson, PhD, a lead associate at Booz Allen Hamilton.

Bldg. 31, Conference Room 2A48

Please register with Yvette Pittman at [yvette.pittman@nih.gov](mailto:yvette.pittman@nih.gov).