

Question

TO: Senate

QUESTION FROM: Senators Noyhouzer, Toccalino and Mills

RESPONSE FROM: Senator Nalbantoglu (Dean of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies)

SUBJECT: Question and Response Regarding Post-Doctoral Fellows Teaching Opportunities at McGill

MEETING DATE: February 17, 2016

PREAMBLE: The vast majority (81%) of Canadian Post-Doctoral Fellows (PDFs) survey respondents, when embarking on their fellowship, view an academic position as their primary career goal (CAPS/Mitacs, 2013). With approximately 40% of PhD graduates working in the post-secondary (PSE) sector (Conference Board of Canada, 2015), a postdoctoral fellowship should provide the experience and training necessary to facilitate an academic career.

Teaching is a fundamental aspect of an academic career. A number of McGill's equivalent universities have structured teaching training programs and extensive teaching opportunities for PDFs. At these institutions, PDFs play a valuable role in contributing to course development and teaching at undergraduate and graduate levels. The provision of teaching and training opportunities is vital not only for attracting the best post-doctoral candidates to McGill, but also for the personal development of the PDFs. Acquiring such an experience and skills will make PDFs more attractive in the workplace following the completion of their fellowship.

QUESTION:

1. What teaching training programs and teaching opportunities are currently available to PDFs at departments across McGill?
2. Does McGill have any plans to develop a teaching training program and consistent teaching experiences for PDFs across McGill?

References

The Canadian Association of Postdoctoral Scholars/L'Association Canadienne de Stagiaires Postdoctoraux (CAPS-ACSP) and Mitacs. (2013) The 2013 Canadian Postdoc Survey: Painting a Picture of Canadian Postdoctoral Scholars available at https://www.mitacs.ca/sites/default/files/caps-mitacs_postdoc_report-full_oct22013-final.pdf

Edge, Jessica, and Daniel Munro (2015) Inside and Outside the Academy: Valuing and Preparing PHDs for Careers. Ottawa: The Conference Board of Canada, 2015 available at <http://www.conferenceboard.ca/e-library/abstract.aspx?did=7564>

RESPONSE

As written in the Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies Commitments of Postdoctoral Scholars and Supervisors, postdoctoral training is an important stage in scholarly development and career advancement. The training is conducted under the supervision of a professor who is a member of McGill's academic staff qualified in the discipline in which training is being provided and has the abilities to fulfill responsibilities as a supervisor of the research and mentor for career development. Postdoctoral trainees are expected to perform research (either in collaboration with the supervisor or independently under general supervision), to be able to write manuscripts and research proposals, and to present their research effectively, all at a competitive level. In addition to research skills, it is important that Postdocs achieve proficiency in other professional skills essential for embarking upon a successful career. Although responsibilities other than research, such as teaching, are usually minimal, such activities can be pursued in the context of the Postdoc's personal training goals. The practice of engaging Postdocs varies from Faculty to Faculty.

The Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies Commitments of Postdoctoral Scholars and Supervisors may be found at:

http://www.mcgill.ca/gps/files/gps/Commitments_of_Postdoctoral_Scholars_and_Supervisors_July_09.pdf

Regarding question number 1, McGill supports PDF teaching development by offering multiple opportunities for PDFs to develop skills relevant to teaching.

Learning to Teach Day: This one-day conference is led by McGill professors, TAs, and graduate students. Topics discussed include effective teaching and grading strategies in an interactive and engaging atmosphere. The conference aims to equip graduate students and postdocs with the tools and knowledge to help them maximize teaching potential and create a successful learning environment for students. In 2014 and 2015, a total of 58 postdoctoral fellows participated in Learning to Teach Day.

The Postdoctoral eBulletin (Archives): SKILLSETS creates a customized eBulletin sent twice monthly to all postdoctoral fellows that advertises and promotes upcoming teaching, skills, and career events. Here are a few examples:

1. [Teaching what's important: Educating students for today and tomorrow](#)
2. [Leading Effective Discussions Workshop](#)
3. [Teaching at a CEGEP](#)
4. ["Assessment: The Silent Killer of Learning" with Prof. Eric Mazur](#)
5. [Introduction to Course Design and Teaching Workshop](#)

The Postdoctoral Research Day: Intended to recognize the contributions of postdoctoral fellows in the Montreal community, the event provides skills development opportunities such as networking, presentation skills, and communication. Postdoctoral fellows present short oral talks and poster presentations to an audience that includes professors, industry partners, and government agencies.

Graphos Peer Writing Groups and Workshops: Postdoctoral fellows can apply to convene and lead peer writing groups of graduate students. PDFs can also apply to develop and lead writing workshops for graduate students.

All of the above are opportunities for PDFs to enhance their skillset for teaching.

Regarding question number 2, currently there are no such plans in place but GPS welcomes suggestions for the development of a teacher training program and teaching opportunities for PDFs so long as any opportunity or requirement to participate is in line with the fellows' appointments.

McGill is also exploring ways to support further skills development for PDFs. As written in the Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies Commitments of Postdoctoral Scholars and Supervisors, Postdocs are responsible for creating an Individualized Training Program, meaning articulating their own career goals and particular objectives for the training period, including development of research and other professional skills.

In order to support and encourage Postdocs to articulate career goals and training objectives, McGill is currently promoting the development of IDPs (Individual development plans) for postdocs. An IDP supports postdocs in planning their professional goals and taking steps to attain their goals. IDPs are common practice in peer institutions in the United States, and mandatory for all NIH-funded postdocs. A commonly used tool for postdocs in STEM disciplines is MyIDP (<http://myidp.sciencecareers.org/>), an online tool developed by the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS). Similar tools are in development for social sciences and humanities.

The PDFs can outline in the IDP the complementary training they will need to meet the objectives set out for the training period and set themselves up to meet their career goals. As stated above, McGill provides a wealth of training opportunities that develop skills related to teaching.