

Post-docs an Unstoppable Force at UC San Diego



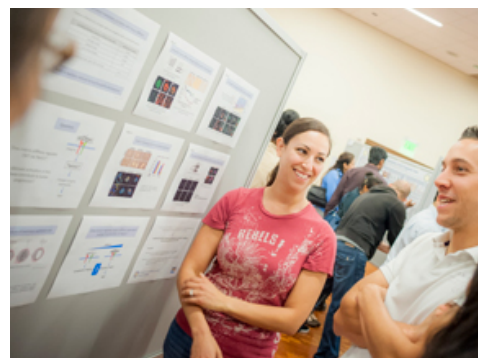
Photos by Erik Jepsen/UC San Diego Publications

Although one of the smallest academic demographics on campus with just 1,250 individuals, postdoctoral scholars at the University of California, San Diego are instrumental in driving the university's groundbreaking research and innovative discoveries. These scholars skillfully manage immense research projects, work to secure grants to support the continuation of their work, present their findings at conferences and mentor budding students. Highly ambitious with a desire to make an impact in their field, post-docs are unstoppable forces.

Occupying a unique place in academia, postdoctoral scholars possess a doctorate degree and choose to advance their knowledge by taking up a research training position after completion of a formal graduate program. While there has been significant growth in the number of post-docs in engineering and social sciences, most often these individuals specialize in the natural sciences and medicine and use the opportunity to bridge their knowledge with a related field. Scholars spend up to five years training under a faculty member before they continue on to faculty positions, launch their own laboratory or begin a career in a related industry.

“Emerging experts in their fields, postdoctoral scholars are indefatigable achievers,” said Chancellor Pradeep K. Khosla. “Their contributions enhance and sustain the initiatives that have positioned UC San Diego as a top research-focused university.”

UC San Diego’s post-docs were invited to celebrate and connect during the fourth annual Post-doc Appreciation Week, held Sept. 13 to 20. The event was hosted by the Office of Postdoctoral and Visiting Scholar Affairs, in collaboration with the UC San Diego Postdoctoral Association. New this year was the Research Symposium, which offered post-docs the opportunity to present their work to a variety of audiences. Throughout the following week, postdocs had the opportunity to attend career-building workshops and networking events.



Research Symposium: Poster Session

Several stellar post-docs were awarded the inaugural Chancellor’s Postdoctoral Scholar Award, which recognize standout contributions in research, mentoring, service and professional engagement. One of this year’s recipients included Kristen Tolson, a postdoctoral fellow in the lab of Alexander Kauffman, in the department of reproductive medicine. Her current research involves studying the hormone kisspeptin—discovered in Hershey, Pennsylvania and named after the Hershey’s Kiss candy—and its role in fertility and metabolism.



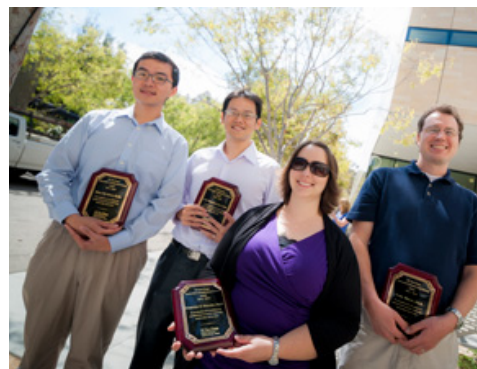
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In addition to her research responsibilities, Tolson makes time to mentor the next generation of bright scientists. She also leads the effort to build an engaging post-doc community at UC San Diego. Fostering a lifelong interest in learning about how things work, Tolson is always looking for ways to share her passion for science with others. In coordination with the student-run Society for Undergraduate Research and Outreach, Tolson conducts laboratory demonstrations with local underserved middle and high school students who visit UC San Diego to gain firsthand experience in biomedical research.

“I enjoy working with students to realize their potential and expand their minds,” said Tolson. “Science is exciting, and I think it’s important for all students to have a basic science foundation, even if that isn’t going to be their career.”

When Tolson first arrived at UC San Diego, she found that the postdoctoral community was not as active as she had imagined it would be. She decided to take on the role of chair of networking and outreach for the UC San Diego Postdoctoral Association, where she has made significant advances toward building connections between scholars, increasing opportunities for career enhancement and organizing fundraising efforts. Her work has resulted in an expansion of programs and an increased budget to support events such as this year’s newly established Research Symposium.

“We are excited to witness the growth of Post-doc Appreciation Week and shine a spotlight on the work of our extraordinary post-docs,” said Jennifer Oh, director of the Office of Postdoctoral and Visiting Scholar Affairs. “What began as a day to honor our post-docs has grown to be a weeklong celebration of their achievements, their mentors and their importance to the UC San Diego community.”



Chancellor's Postdoctoral Scholar Award recipients

In addition to Tolson, three other post-docs were chosen for their outstanding achievements, including Che-Ming Jack Hu, nanoengineering; Ping Piu Kuo, electrical and computer engineering; and Carl Melis, physics. The Chancellor’s Award for Excellence in Postdoctoral Scholar Mentoring was presented to Pamela Mellon, reproductive medicine; Dr. Victor Nizet, pediatrics and Skaggs School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences; and Michael Sailor, chemistry and biochemistry; for their dedication and extraordinary mentorship to post-docs.

The Office of Postdoctoral and Visiting Scholar Affairs offers scholars the professional development resources they need to effectively apply their research background to a variety of careers and enhance their postdoctoral training experience. For more information, visit <http://postdoc.ucsd.edu>. For those interested in learning more about the Postdoctoral Association—which works to build a vibrant post-doc community at UC San Diego, offer training and networking opportunities and much more—visit <http://pda.ucsd.edu/>.

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