

## **DIALOG IV SYMPOSIUM REPORT: What's up with this new generation of aquatic scientists?**

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The DIALOG IV symposium took place October 14-19, 2001 at the Bermuda Biological Station for Research (BBSR). Forty-four recent PhDs of 14 nationalities (American, Australian, Austrian, British, Canadian, Chinese, Dutch, German, Israeli, Japanese, Jordanian, Spanish, Ukrainian and Venezuelan) met shortly after Hurricane Karen blew through leaving the station on reduced power and water for the first two days. Rather than relying on the usual slides and PowerPoint for introductions, participants improvised with flip charts. If anything, this just intensified group camaraderie. Participants were selected by committee through a process that ensured a broad range of expertise, from freshwater streams to the deep sea, from chemistry and physics to ecological theory and from picoplankton to seabirds. In addition to the usual activities (oral and poster presentations, working-groups, shared meals and informal networking) participants spent 8 hours with communication consultants to gain experience in team building. Below are some of the highlights. Working-group reports mentioned below will be published on the DIALOG webpage—go to <http://aslo.org> and click on the Programs for PhDs folder, then on the Publications folder.

**An excellent job is hard to find!** Uncertainty about jobs weighs particularly heavy on most minds. A full 72% of the American participants at DIALOG IV were on postdocs or other temporary positions. Despite the uncertainty, overall job satisfaction was at 1.7 on a scale with 1.0 as “very satisfied and 5.0 as “very dissatisfied”. They were less enthusiastic about the overall job market, rating it 2.7. Participants with permanent jobs are putting together some tips based on their experience.

**Have you been nice to a postdoc lately?** We all know the many advantages of postdocs. But if you ask a postdoc what the worst part of the job is, you might be surprised by the answer. Many at the recent DIALOG symposium expressed a sense of isolation. Having left behind the support network and friendships generated as grad students through shared classes, many felt shunned by students at their new institution. Many students seem to assume postdocs are tied up with family or other relationships, or perhaps simply assume they no longer have shared interests. On the other hand, postdocs are generally not part of the activities that draw new faculty into the fold. All this is further compounded by the sense that postdocs are transients who will not be around long enough to build relationships.

Fortunately this seems an easy thing to remedy—invite a postdoc to lunch, a Frisbee game, or whatever is on!

**Time is an issue.** “Time, Time, Time – Never enough!” was a common complaint. If in permanent relationships, there was too little time for partners or family. The singles felt they had no time to establish relationships or even for hobbies. Much time was spent discussing how to allocate that precious commodity so that neither work nor family was cheated. Sadly, no solution was found! One participant remarked “Professional science seems to demand 80-hr work days and has little respect for other aspects of personal development.” Another quipped “You can’t work enough.” A new faculty member added, “I need to clone myself.” My personal sense is that the situation, unfortunately, does not improve with time....

**Know thyself (and others!)** Communication Consultants Chris Olex and Michelle Walker helped participants identify their leadership style and use it effectively in a team setting. Despite widespread belief that science PhDs would most likely end up in the most aggressive, controlling/driven category, only 36% of the DIALOG IV group did so. The most important take-home lesson was that all of us have much to offer, even we driven personalities! The trick is to identify and use your personal traits effectively, and learn how to get the most out of a team with mixed styles. Whatever their style, the best leaders and participants bring out the best in others.

**Working Group reports.** Once basic team-building skills had been honed, participants broke into various groups to discuss topics of interest and make recommendations. Several reports are in preparation, and will be posted on the DIALOG webpage as they become available. Reports “in prep” include finding and getting that first job, identifying a “hot topic” (and knowing when, and when not, to jump on the bandwagon, and recommended readings).

**Proposal writing tips.** Deneb Karentz, NSF Associate Program Manager for Antarctic Biology and Medicine at NSF, compiled information provided by Philip Harriman, Pamela Talalay, Dennis Peacock and the NSF webpage to provide a very informative 4-page set of guidelines for proposal writers. This has been posted on the DIALOG webpage in the Publications folder, under “proposal-writing tips” (or go to <http://aslo.org/dialog/proposal.pdf>).

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