

2012 Career Symposium Report

Organizing Committee

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Overview

Based on feedback from last year's event, we tried to include the popular features of previous career symposia, and made a few small changes, as follows:

Length of the event: We had the full event on one day (Oct.15, 2012). In previous years, the event was 1.5 days, with a panel discussion on the second day addressing "How to become a group leader". We focused only on 'alternative career paths', and opted to hold the panel discussion as a separate, unrelated event in the spring.

Focus: We invited speakers representing four career paths: industry, business (ie. patent law / consulting), scientific administration, and science writing.

Career consulting: This was quite a popular feature from the previous year, so we again offered one-on-one sessions with a career advisor from Kepos. However, we did not offer the evening workshops.

Industry stands: We didn't invite company representatives to set up stands advertising career opportunities. In previous years, these stands lead to some frustration, where the participants were unhappy with the level of information that the company reps could offer, and the companies were unhappy with the level of interest from the participants.

Participants: We had ~ 100 participants, and of these participants, 52 people filled out the survey. From these responses, 50% were PhD students, 30% were postdocs, 10% were masters students and ~10% were other. They came from MPICBG (37%), BIOTEC (27%), CRTD (12%), MTZ (10%), BCUBE (8%), and TU Dresden (6%).

Below are some more details of the career symposium, including feedback from participants. For the complete survey, visit: <https://de.surveymonkey.com/>
Benutzername: career-day-2012; Password: careerday

Speakers

We had a total of 8 speakers, and arranged them into 4 separate sessions: (i) introduction / patent law, (ii) science administration, (iii) industry, and (iv) scientific writing / editing.

Time	Talks	Workshops
09:00		Career Advice by Axel Szabowski (KEPOS)*
09:30	Introduction & Welcome	
09:45	Andrea Hutterer	
10:15	Tim Oppermann	
10:45	Coffee Break	
11:00	Anne Marie Glynn	
11:30	Schallum Werner	
12:00	Lunch	
13:30	Elena Quesada	
14:00	Denis Shamiryan	
14:30	Coffee Break	
15:00	Marcus Anhaeuser	
15:30	Abigail Klopper	
16:00	Closing Remarks	
16:15		
-	Meet the Speaker Mixer	
17:30		

We invited many speakers that had done their PhD or postdoc at the MPI-CBG, or who we knew through other connections, and specifically aimed for speakers that had made a recent transition. This gave a very casual and conversational tone to the symposium, and allowed the speakers to connect with the audience by giving their personal 'story' of how they transitioned out of academic research.

Here is what we found useful to communicate to the speakers ahead of time:

- Please give a personal account of your experience
 - What is your scientific background?
 - What do you do now?
 - How did you get to where you are today?
 - What technical skills were important to get the job?

- What skills were most transferrable to your current line of work?
- Please also say something about a typical career trajectory in this line of work

Covering speakers costs:

- Speakers were given an honorary contract to cover the travel and accommodation expenses.
- This was coordinated through Dana Jaster (dana.jaster@tu-dresden.de)
- To set up the contract, Dana required the following information:
 - Name, Surname, academic title
 - date of birth
 - home address
 - employer and job (title)
- We also covered the lunches for all speakers. Simply give the 'guest card' (from Birgit or Denise) to the kitchen staff, and a list of the speakers names. They will verify the speakers names (from name tags) and debit the card.

Other notes:

- One of our speakers (from LifeTech) cancelled with only 3 weeks remaining until the event. In future, it would be best to have at least one additional speaker lined up. This should be possible if you know some of the speakers on an informal basis.
- We had quite some difficulty attracting speakers without already having some connection. Eg, we tried to get a consulting company to visit, and received No's (or no response) from 3 companies. Similarly, Roche and Novartis declined our invitation when we contacted their recruiting department.

Feedback:

- Only 50% of the participants attended the introduction. Suggests that this was too early in the morning. Next time, start at 10am.
- Of the people that attended the introduction, 50% said it was informative (highest rating of all talks). Implies that it's good to start with this type of high level overview.
- The science writing, and science administration sessions had higher attendance (80%), than industry or patent law (~65%).
- 80% of participants said the range of topics and speakers was "good", 10% said "too narrow", 10% said "not for me".
- Written responses often mentioned a lack of industry speakers (eg, from LifeTech, BASF, Qiagen). This was unfortunate, since we had a speaker from LifeTech that cancelled, and also invited speakers from Roche and Novartis that declined our invitation. In general, it's quite challenging to get the speakers that you want, and some compromise has to be made.
- 2-3 people also requested that HR managers be invited in the future. As mentioned above, this is challenging because they often end up being under-utilized by the participants, and then they're unhappy after traveling all the way here and spending the day in the atrium.
- One request was to mix the speakers up (rather than having topical sessions), so that people who attend for ½ day still see a range of topics.
- People seemed to like that it was all on only one day.
- Participants were interested to hear about remuneration in the various fields.
- Suggested topics for next year: science education, science policy.

Career Counseling

Again, this was a very popular event, and all of the slots filled up in advance. These meetings were held in the 2nd floor North meeting room to ensure privacy, since this was a concern from participants in 2010.

From Kepos, it's important to remember to get a formal quote for the cost of their visit, and then forward this to Birgit in advance of the event.

Feedback:

- 50% of the participants said that it was informative.
- Twice as many people said that it should be repeated vs. those who said that it should not be repeated.
- A few participants mentioned that Dr. Szabowski was not very friendly or engaging, and that next year we should invite a different career consultant.
- Many participants also mentioned that it was too short to get useful feedback. Could do less slots, and make them 20-25min.

Based on these comments, we feel that a similar event should be repeated again next year; however, some changes should be made. In order to get maximum impact in a short time window, it might work better to focus these meetings on one topic eg, resume feedback, with some advanced preparation. Another interesting suggestion is to create a fake job posting, and to ask all of the participants to draft a cover letter for it. The meetings could then be used to go through and critique the cover letter as a learning exercise. Perhaps a prize for the best submission?

Stands

Rather than having company stands (see above for explanation), we set up tables in the atrium (directly in front of the library) and encouraged the speakers to return here during the coffee breaks and mixer so that attendees could ask follow up questions. In general, I think it was a good strategy to cordon off a corner of the atrium, and to encourage everyone to return there during the coffee breaks and mixer. However, there's really no need to set up tables – it's easier for people to find the speakers around the coffee bar and engage in conversation.

Food

We had two coffee breaks and a 'Meet the Speaker' mixer at the end of the day. The coffee breaks were arranged by Birgit Knepper and the cost was covered by the PhD program. The Meet the Speaker Mixer was arranged by Simone Reber and the cost was covered by the postdoc funds.

Coffee Costs

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Mixer Costs

Juice (12 bottles)	32 E
Water (6 bottles)	10 E
Cheese/Bread	95 E
Canteen service	55 E
Total	192 E

Overall, it was great to have the coffee and snacks to break up the morning and afternoon sessions. The mixer at the end of the day was also popular, but we only needed about 50% of the food. We planned for 70 participants (for which this is a lot of food!), but at the end of the day there were probably only 40 participants that stayed for the mixer. Others only came for particular sessions, or snuck back to lab at the end of the day.

Feedback:

- 36% of the participants used the coffee breaks and mixer to get in contact with the speakers. Of these people, everyone said it was very helpful. This is amazing!

Advertising

Emails: First email went out 5 weeks before the event, which of course nobody paid attention to, and then lots of emails in the remaining weeks.

Poster: Printed 30cmx30cm posters and hung these up at the entrance to each home base, and in the elevators. Also printed 4 large (75x75cm) posters through the PhotoLab, for a total cost of 72E. Placed two of these in the atrium, and the others at BIOTEC and CRTD.

⇒ Speak to Kostas Margitudis in the Photolab to get a copy of the Adobe Illustrator file from 2012.

Flyers: Print out one week before the event and place at the coffee bar and front desk. Nice because people can keep them on hand throughout the day, to remind themselves when the different sessions start.

Website: Built off of last year's website. Posted this ~ 1 week before the event. Ideally, could include a link to this website with the first email (1 month before the event), but this requires having all speakers confirmed! Also, need to ask all speakers for a photo and bio (which took quite some time to get).

⇒ See Jeff Oegema for help setting up the website.

Feedback:

- A few complaints about the frequency of emails in the few days leading up to the event.

On the day of the event

There are a few things that must be done on the day of the event:

- Set up speakers computers in the auditorium with Kostas.
- Water and glasses for speakers at the front of the auditorium.
- Collect a list of signatures from participants. Simply place the sign-up sheets (from Birgit Knepper) in front of the auditorium door. This is used to justify the costs of hosting the event.
- Collect all reimbursement forms from speakers. Requires original signature.
- Name tags for organizers and speakers. Especially helpful when paying for the speakers lunches (below).
- Lunches for speakers. Collect the 'guest card' (electronic \$ card) from Birgit Knepper and give to the kitchen staff, with a list of the invited speakers. The speakers can then show their name tags at the till and their lunch will be paid.
- After the event, follow up with a survey (www.surveymonkey.com) to get feedback for the following year!

Final remarks

We hope that this document helps. It was quite rewarding to organize the Career Symposium, and it's a very important source of career advice for PhDs and postdocs in the institute. One piece of advice to future organizers would be to try and finalize speakers as early as possible, since everything (schedule, advertisements, travel arrangements/reimbursements) requires this information. Here's a rough roadmap for how to get started next year...

Getting started

- identify topic areas (eg. industry, consulting, administration)
- pick the date (availability depends on PhD course events)
- book the auditorium
- invite speakers (use connections where ever possible) and **confirm**

Next steps

- give speakers information (eg. what to speak about, how travel reimbursement works)
- start putting together advertisement (make poster, website, ...)

Again, the key is to start early (> 4 months) and get your speakers confirmed. After that, everything falls into place.

Good luck!