

# THE PGA POST

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DANA-FARBER  
POSTDOC AND  
GRADUATE STUDENT  
ASSOCIATION

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## The PGA Retreat: Celebrating Our Hard Work

From September 19-23 we celebrated the annual Postdoc Appreciation Week with a variety of activities throughout the institute. Once again, the PGA Retreat was the highlight event. Implemented through the hard work of the PGSAO and the PGA Retreat Committee, this year's retreat had the largest turnout ever and was a huge success!

Mr. David Jensen, who writes for the AAAS *Science Careers* website, kicked off the retreat with a highly informative presentation for job seekers. Following a lively Q&A session, the audience moved to the poster hall where we had dynamic discussions on many cutting-edge projects undertaken by our colleagues.

In the next session, Dr. Robert Weinberg, a pillar of cancer research, gave an inspiring summary of his recent work on epithelial-mesenchymal transition. We then listened to excellent



2011 PGSAO Retreat

talks from four of our own graduate students and postdocs, and everyone enjoyed a fun and interactive trivia game that followed the talks.

The day ended with a cocktail/networking reception where Dr. Barrett Rollins, who has always recognized the importance of postdoctoral fellows and advocated for our benefits, presented

\$1,000 travel awards to the top graduate and postdoc presenters. You can learn more about the awardees on page 2 of this newsletter.

With all the fun and benefits of the retreat, why not consider participating next year? Whether or not you submit an abstract, you will always find the retreat to be a rewarding experience!

## Where @ DFCI?



Do you know where this is?  
Send your answer to  
[dfci\\_pgapost@dfci.harvard.edu](mailto:dfci_pgapost@dfci.harvard.edu)  
Correct answers will be entered into a raffle for a gift card!

Congratulations to Jennifer Molina on the newest addition to her happy family!

## Book Recommendations: Tired of Reading Papers?

Do you need to take a break from the bench or from poring over scientific papers? Try out one of these books for guilt-free (since they're still science related!) leisure reading.

**The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks** by Rebecca Skloot tells the story of the person behind our much-used HeLa cell line and discusses questions of ethics, the emotions felt by Henrietta Lacks' family upon discovering that her

cells have been in culture for quite some time, and the impact that these cells have had on scientific discoveries.

**The Emperor of All Maladies: A Biography of Cancer** by Siddhartha Mukherjee is a book that should be especially interesting to Dana-Farber researchers since it highlights the early work of Dr. Sidney Farber and the development of DFCI. Moreover, it details the history of cancer research and

does not fail to include the human side of it all, ultimately providing great motivation to keep doing the work that we do.



# Straight Talk with the Winners of the Retreat Award

## Sarah Walker

Laboratory of Dr. David Frank, Department of Medical Oncology  
Years at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute: 5 as a graduate student and 5 as a postdoc  
PhD School: Harvard Medical School

**Will use the Travel Award to attend:** AACR meeting

**On how she won awards for the best poster for two successive years:** I always choose an interesting topic and try to keep the poster as simple as possible with good visuals.

**On how to enjoy your work:** Maintain a balance between the work that you are doing and things outside of work. Make sure to allocate some time for fun activities.

**On how to choose a career that fits:** Plan ahead and test career options while still a postdoc! I taught cell biology at UMass Boston and that helped me solidify my goal to combine teaching with independent research. I am currently applying for faculty positions.



## Hilary Wade

Laboratory of Dr. Myles Brown, Department of Medical Oncology  
Years at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute: 1  
PhD School: Duke University

**Will use the Travel Award to attend:** Abcam conference – Chromatin: Structure & Function 2011

**On what motivates her:** Being closer to the clinical side of science reminds me that this is why we do what we do. Also, working in a hospital environment and seeing patients every day serve as a constant reminder of the importance of the research done at DFCl.

**On the key to a project's success:** Take full advantage of the resources available at the new institution and hit the ground running. I find writing a grant proposal at the beginning of a new project to be of great help as this forces one to think through and plan each step of the project.



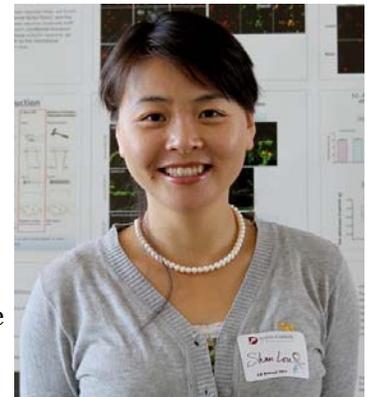
## Shan Lou

Laboratory of Dr. QiuFu Ma, Department of Cancer Biology  
Years at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute: 2.5  
Currently a graduate student in Neuroscience program of the Harvard Medical School

**Will use the Travel Award to attend:** Society for Neuroscience conference

**Thoughts about the PGA Retreat:** I liked the community environment and I made a lot of friends. I realized that one has to always keep an open mind to take cues from other fields and projects. I appreciate the general suggestions and feedback I got from my oral presentation. I also liked the talks by Dr. Weinberg and David Jensen.

**On how to tackle problems with research:** If it is an exploratory novel project, I would take a break, think about why it didn't work and start trouble shooting the experiment. I will try to set up multiple conditions that can answer the question. If I were unable to repeat a previously published experiment, I would mail the group that published the report, and if it is a critical experiment, even contemplate visiting their lab to get the experiment going.



## Jian Hu

Laboratory of Dr. Ron DePinho, Department of Medical Oncology  
Years at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute: 4  
PhD School: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

**Will use the Travel Award to attend:** AACR meeting

**On the key to a successful talk:** I got feedback from previous seminar presentations, lab meetings and departmental talks. I also frequently present my work at conferences, which is helpful.

**What he enjoys most working at DFCl:** Concentrated research focus and working with talented and enthusiastic postdocs. I especially like the collaborative research environment at DFCl.

**Favorite event at the Retreat:** I liked the poster presentations and would like to see more time allocated for them at next year's retreat.



## Saving for Your Future—Some Options to Consider

We know that we have to save for the future, particularly for retirement, but recent financial crises may weaken our confidence in placing our money into anything but a FDIC insured savings account. However, the earnings from a low-interest savings account will not offset the decrease in monetary value from inflation. Additionally, it is unlikely that Social Security will sustain a 20-30 year retirement.

If you invest early, you can take advantage of the power of compounding interest, which allows a small investment to grow substantially. For example, if you are 30 and initially invest \$3000 at 5% compound interest, with \$100 monthly contributions, you would total \$127,846 over 35 years, \$82,846 or 65% of which would be earned from interest alone. However if you start investing at 55 for 10 years with the same contributions and interest, you

would only total \$20,386 (\$5386 or 26% earned from interest alone). So it really makes sense to start saving now!

Before investing, first understand the risks. Some investments involve the risk of the loss of your principal investment. Many investments are uninsured and not guaranteed. On the other hand, higher risks are often balanced by the possibility of higher gains over long investment periods. A way to minimize risk is to keep a diverse portfolio of cash, stocks, bonds, mutual funds, or index funds and change the proportions from higher risk to lower risk investments as you near retirement.

Next, consider the retirement account tax advantages. Taxes deferred can earn compound interest but untaxed retirement funds can be better if you are in a higher tax bracket after retirement. There can be pen-



*Retirement may be far away, but start saving now and you'll be glad you did!*

alties and taxes for unqualified early withdrawal. Third, consider where you are investing. Institutions have different costs to set up the account, transaction fees and rollover options.

Two major tax-advantaged retirement plans are the 403b annuity and Investment Retirement Account (IRA). Dana-Farber offers a tax sheltered 403b plan to all DFCI-paid employees

through Fidelity Investments and TIAA-CREF. An annuity plan offers guaranteed income post-retirement in the form of regular fixed or variable taxed payments for life. Fixed payments depend on how much you have contributed and accumulated with the plan. Variable annuity payments fluctuate according to the value of initial diversified investments. When your employment ends, your account can be directly rolled over to your new employer's retirement plan or to an IRA without penalty, or you may choose a taxed distribution (repayment to you). For more information see <https://dfcionline.org/employee/benefits/benefitslists/taxshelteredannuity.aspx>

You can also invest in a traditional IRA or Roth IRA (at a maximum of \$5000/year) at various financial institutions including investment

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## Alternative Science Careers: Is Science Writing for You?

Are you more interested in learning about science than actually doing it? Have you ever thought about leaving the bench and pursuing a career in science writing or editing? If so, here are some tips for beginners:

If you're not sure whether this career path is right for you, then start by getting some experience while you are still a postdoc. For instance, if you enjoy the technical aspects of writing, consider applying for a

flexible, part-time contract editor position at a company like American Journal Experts (for more info, [www.journalexpert.com](http://www.journalexpert.com)), which provides scientific editing, translation, content review and other manuscript services designed to help researchers through the publication process. Working from home for a company like AJE is a great way to gain off-site scientific editing experience and to earn some money in your spare time while reading

papers in your field!

If you have a passion for communicating the latest hot topics in science to a larger audience, then science journalism might be a good fit for you. To hone your science writing skills, search for a science reporting internship at a local magazine or newspaper. If you want to receive more formal training and get a better edge, some local universities such as MIT and BU offer one-year graduate

programs in science writing/journalism.

After you have some science writing/editing experience under your belt, join a professional organization such as New England Science Writers ([neswonline.com](http://neswonline.com)) or the National Association of Science Writers ([www.nasw.org](http://www.nasw.org)) for access to members-only job postings, freelance opportunities, networking, internships and workshops.

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If you are interested in contributing to the PGA Newsletter, email us at [dfci\\_pgapost@dfci.harvard.edu](mailto:dfci_pgapost@dfci.harvard.edu)

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firms, some insurance companies, banks or credit unions. With the traditional IRA, contributions and earnings are tax-deferred, so distributions (starting at age 59.5 yrs) are taxed. Also, contributions to a traditional IRA may be tax deductible under some circumstances. With a Roth IRA, contributions are taxed but earnings and distributions are tax-free. A Roth IRA also has more flexibility in the timing of withdrawals. For a detailed analysis of the differences, see <http://www.fool.com/money/allaboutiras/allaboutiras03.htm>.

Ultimately, starting to learn about your options now will allow you to use time to your advantage and give you more control over your finances in the future.

*Note: Material presented in this article is intended for information purposes only. It is not intended as professional advice and should not be construed as such. Please consult a tax or financial professional for further information.*

## PGA calendar

**November 30, 2011** Breakfast with Benefits

**December 1, 2011** Visa Seminar for International Scholars (Jimmy Fund Auditorium)

**December 16, 2011** Brain Lunch (TBD)

**Coming Soon**—Industry Exploration Program  
Details TBA

Events subject to change. Visit <http://dfcionline.org/departments/postdoc/events/default.aspx> for updates.



## Ask Sonal!

Have a question for our science program director? Email [sonal\\_jhaveri@dfci.harvard.edu](mailto:sonal_jhaveri@dfci.harvard.edu)

**Q:** I'm a postdoc and am struggling with writing up my results into a manuscript. Where can I get help?

**A:** Great question! If you are having trouble putting pen to paper, the Postdoc and Graduate Student Affairs Office offers several great resources to help trainees develop their writing skills. For example, during our "10-Week Workshop on Writing Scientific Manuscripts" (offered twice a year), you can learn the fundamentals of scientific writing as you work on completing your own research paper for publication. The PGSAO also offers programs that focus on other types of writing, such as "Writing Winning Resumes for Industry Jobs" and "Grant Writing Strategies"; these seminars are offered periodically, so check out the Upcoming Events section of the PGSAO website (<http://dfcionline.org/departments/postdoc/events/>) for details on the next sessions.

If you already have a draft of your documents and want feedback on the language, set up an appointment with me. I provide one-on-one science editing services to postdocs and graduate students for manuscripts, theses, CVs, cover letters, résumés, etc. For more information, please email me.

## Curiosity Corner



**Sugar versus Cocaine:** An interesting study was done to figure out what rats preferred when given the choice between sugar and cocaine. Rats were put in a cage with access to water spiked with sugar. In addition, they were also intravenously hooked to a cocaine bottle, which could be self-administered by pressing a knob. Surprisingly, rats preferred the sugar solution over cocaine shots! Well, now we know why sugar can be so good and addictive... (*Neuron* vol 69, Feb 2011; *PLoS ONE* vol 2, 2007)

**Cats and Dogs drink differently!** Dogs lap up water by curling their tongue into a cuplike shape, whereas cats rest the tip of their tongue on the liquid's surface without penetrating it. The water adheres to the cat's tongue and is pulled upward, creating a liquid column, the top of which is captured by the cat before gravity draws it down. Furthermore, this mode of drinking is conserved among domesticated as well as wild felines. It will be interesting to check how our ancestors drank compared to apes! (*Science* vol 330, Nov 2010)

