



Boston University Professional Development & Postdoctoral Affairs



A Year of Transformation

Annual Report | FY2020

Overview

Boston University is committed to providing a supportive and competitive training environment for doctoral and postdoctoral research and scholarship. Professional Development & Postdoctoral Affairs (PDPA) offers programs, resources, and services across both our Charles River and Medical Campus that are tailored to meet the specific needs of doctoral students, postdoctoral scholars (postdocs) and their faculty mentors. Highlights from this year include the launch of two new programs - our first Postdoc Academy course, called “Succeeding as a Postdoc,” and the Provost Mentor Fellows program supporting research mentor training for faculty. We also collaborated with faculty and staff to develop Core Competencies for doctoral students that will inform our expanding professional development curriculum.

Quick Stats

350

Postdoctoral scholars
(61 non-employee, 289 employee)

15

Events for
postocs

19

Workshops
for doctoral
students

100

Postdocs
attended events

51

Advising
appointments

597

Doctoral students attended events

from the desk of the assistant provost

Creating new community spaces

Building community has been a consistent theme in our work this year. Thousands of postdocs were connected to one another virtually through our first Postdoc Academy online course. We are playing a national role in transforming graduate education and postdoctoral training through developing and organizing the Alliances for Graduate

Education and the Professoriate (AGEP) National Research Conference. COVID-19 has highlighted the importance of staying connected, even while apart. The abrupt halt of campus operations and our usual schedule of in-person events meant we had to approach our work differently. I've enjoyed chatting with students and postdocs on our dedicated Slack

channels, which I hope will still be useful for sharing ideas (and of course, memes) even after we return to campus. Our workshops will have a different look and feel this fall, whether it be in virtual Zoom spaces or social distancing in-person. We will continue to be creative to find ways to stay connected to one another.



Sarah Hokanson,
Assistant Provost

Our Work on Campus

The work that we do connects to many University-wide initiatives and working groups that support graduate and postdoctoral training.

AAU PhD Education Initiative

Our selection and participation in the Association of American Universities (AAU) PhD Education Initiative was supported with buy-in from the President and University Provost. In addition to financial resources and administrative support within the Office of Graduate Affairs to support our work in this program, six participating departments - Biology, Biostatistics, Classical Studies, Counseling Psychology and Applied Human Development, Pharmacology, and Sociology - are developing and implementing plans to make the full range of careers available to PhDs in their disciplines visible, viable, and valued by students and faculty.

Taskforce on PhD Skills Expectations

Teaching is an important component of PhD education and professional development. Assistant Provost Hokanson participated in this task force charged with developing a set of skills expectations to be required of all PhD students involved in teaching at Boston University. Recommendations outline the resources, professional development opportunities, and mentoring necessary for PhD teaching fellows to develop reflective teaching practices and expand their skills in communicating expectations, assessment, collaborative and active learning, and inclusive teaching.

Core Competencies for Doctoral Students

Assistant Provost Hokanson co-chaired the Taskforce on PhD Core Competencies, which proposed six general competencies that should be achieved by Boston University PhD students. Learning these skills is part of serving effectively in a diverse, inclusive, and global professional landscape.

Research skills

Gathering empirical knowledge, technical skills, ethics.

Project management & leadership

Budgeting, supervision, relationship-building, collaboration, cultural awareness

Self-awareness

Emotional intelligence, work-life integration, self-study, career planning

Communication

Writing, presenting, digital media, outreach

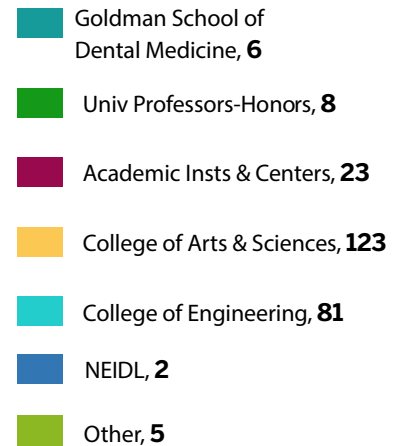
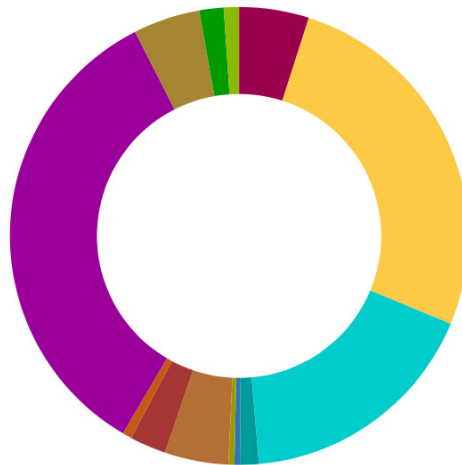
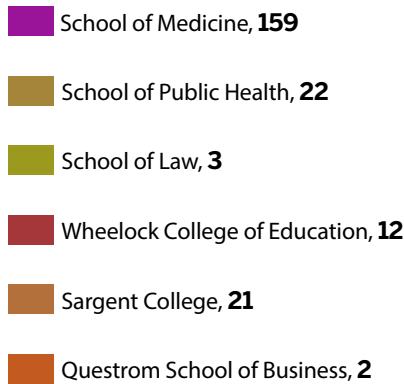
Teaching

Course design, assessment, inclusive learning, tutoring

Discipline-specific knowledge

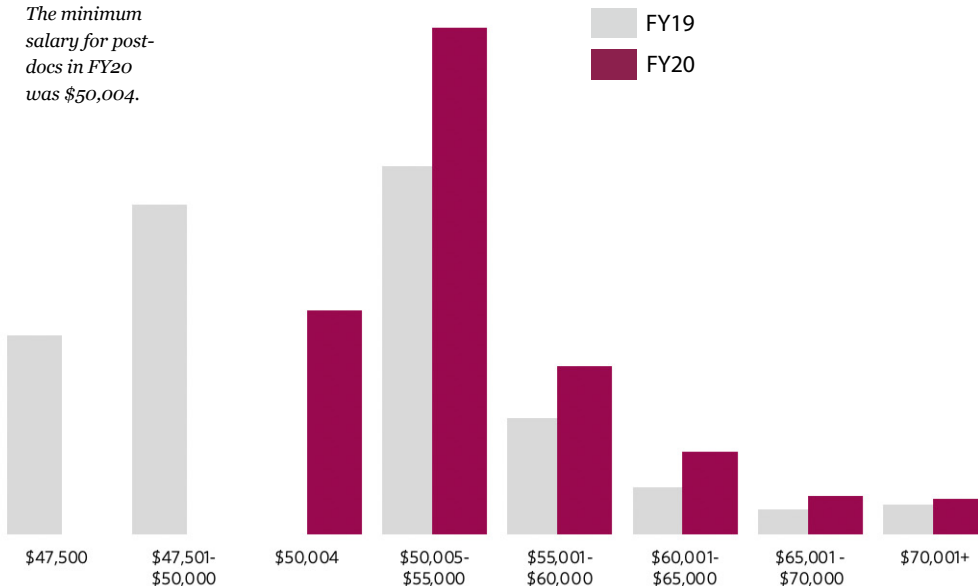
Learning and scholarship in field of study

BU Postdocs: At a Glance



Salary distribution

The minimum salary for postdocs in FY20 was \$50,004.



COUNTRY OF ORIGIN

BU postdocs represent 52 countries. The most common countries of citizenship are:

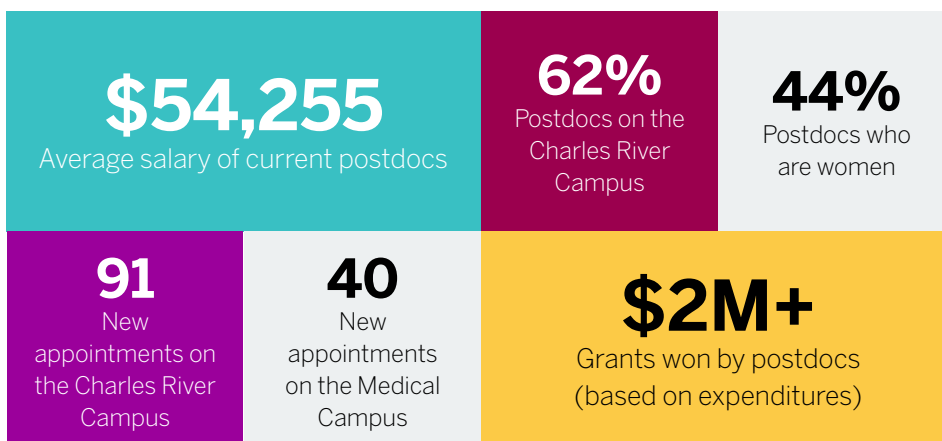
United States **226**
 China **75**
 India **34**
 South Korea **16**

RACE/ETHNICITY

White **238**
 Asian **162**
 Black **17**
 American Indian **2**
 Multiracial **3**
 Hispanic/Latino **25**

Race data is unreported for 74 postdocs.

Quick Stats



Postdoc Onboarding & Benefits

Boston University offers a range of benefits to postdocs, beginning with a comprehensive orientation session the PDPA office offers monthly. We also ensure that all of our non-employee postdocs receive health insurance, dental discounts, and a subsidized travel pass.

34

Non-employee postdocs and their dependents receiving subsidized health insurance



22

Non-employee postdocs receiving subsidized MBTA passes



\$52.6k

Amount reimbursed in non-employee postdoc health insurance

24

Newsletters sent to postdocs over the past year

10

Orientation sessions between July 2019 and August 2020

26

Applicants for PDPA travel awards



\$10.6k

Amount covered in non-employee postdoc MBTA passes

1.2

Average years of service for current postdocs

TEAM MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: Alexandra Bunnell

Alexandra is the PDPA Program Manager. She works on the PDPA website to make all the resources for postdocs easier to find. She also organizes the postdoc orientation,

manages the non-employee benefits program, all PDPA communications, and handles postdoc data requests. This year Alexandra also developed a new onboarding checklist for postdocs.



Professional Development for Postdocs

Quick Stats

36

Business card packages ordered

15

In-person and
online workshops

51

Advising
appointments

100

Workshop attendees

TEAM MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: Brian Fenster



Brian manages events for PDPA and the Office of Research. In his role, he serves as a liaison to event facilitators and members of the Boston University community. He also oversees the logistics of events by selecting the venue location, ordering food, determining the event layout, and making sure that A/V technology is present. Brian can usually be found providing on-the-ground support at these events.

Professional development is at the heart of helping our postdocs realize their professional goals, and PDPA offers postdocs opportunities to build their skills through providing tools, resources, and workshop opportunities throughout the year.

Workshops

The programming that we provide is focused on skill-building, specifically on the core competencies identified by the National Postdoctoral Association as being important for all postdocs – discipline-specific knowledge, research skill development, communication skills, professionalism, and leadership and management skills.



Travel Awards

Boston University is not the only source for professional development, and we encourage our postdocs to seek opportunities outside the University to network and enhance their skills. PDPA offers six travel awards per year to support postdocs to present their work at conferences or attend other professional development opportunities.



Business Cards

Business cards are an essential networking tool for postdocs entering the job market or looking to expand their network of peers and mentors. To ensure all postdocs have access to this resource, PDPA works with postdocs to design and order one complimentary box of business cards.



Postdoc Academy

Postdoc Academy is a comprehensive digital and in-person professional development program available to all postdocs to help them develop the transferable skills that will enable their success in a diverse set of careers.

The Postdoc Academy blends interactive online and in-person content built on the National Postdoctoral Association competencies to support skill development throughout postdoc training, from their orientation as a new postdoc to their next career step. Content uses inclusive, evidence-based approaches and is directed as a resource for the postdoc audience as well as the postdoc offices and associations across the country that support postdocs.

Learning can happen flexibly and programming includes two online courses, supported learning communities (Postdoc Academy Learning Sessions), and open educational materials for download on the website.

This collaborative initiative with Boston University, Northwestern University, Michigan State University, and University of Wisconsin-Madison is funded by the National Institutes of Health Grant No. R25121257. All programming is available at no charge.



Connect with us



postdocacademy.org



postdocacademy@gmail.com



[@PostdocAcademy](https://www.instagram.com/PostdocAcademy)

www.edx.org/course/the-postdoc-academy-succeeding-as-a-postdoc

2,879 registrants

13% completion rate*

93% would recommend to a friend

*National average for online courses is 5.5%



TEAM MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: Celine Young

Celine Young is the Program Director of Postdoc Academy, responsible for operations, content development, facilitation, communications, and partnership management. Celine has been leading online focus groups and in-person workshops to create a new

community for postdocs across campus. You can also find Celine working with the PDPA team to provide in-person professional development for postdocs throughout the year.



BU Postdoc Association

The Boston University Postdoctoral Association (BUPDA) supports and advocates for postdocs, organizes events, and liaises with BU administrators, as well as other postdoctoral associations. The group is open to all postdocs on the Charles River and Medical Campuses, and has an active web presence on PDPA's website as well as Facebook.



BU Postdoctoral Seminar Series

The BUPDA organizes a monthly lunch series featuring two postdocs presenting their research. This offers postdocs an opportunity to present their research and receive feedback, improve their presentation skills, and learn about the research of other postdocs. It also creates opportunities for postdocs to socialize and network.

Postdoc Writing Group

BUPDA started a postdoc writing group. Every Wednesday morning, postdocs sat together to focus on writing or reading that they needed to get done for their research. The goal was to provide a space where they can avoid distractions and be productive. The benefit of working in a shared space is so that postdocs can help each other with discussing their drafts and bouncing ideas off each other.



Boston Postdoctoral Association

The BUPDA is actively involved in the Boston Postdoctoral Association (BPDA), which is a non-profit organization that includes postdoctoral representatives from Boston and Cambridge institutions. Postdocs from BUPDA are involved in the leadership BPDA, including its Presidency, Board of Directors, and Committee Chairs. They also participate actively in the organization of many events and data collection to the benefit of all Boston postdocs.

Postdoc Panel & Networking Session

Together with BU's BEST, BUPDA co-organized a postdoc panel at the Medical Campus, where students learned from biotech, academic, and Veteran's Affairs postdocs about their experiences. After short introductions from all the postdocs, there was a Q & A session and open networking over dinner. Two postdocs from BUPDA sat on the panel.



Social Events

The BUPDA has organized numerous events to help BU postdocs meet each other and enjoy what Boston has to offer. Recently, BU postdocs visited a special exhibit at the Museum of Fine Arts, held a number of pub nights and organized a trip to Nahant Beach.

Professional Development for Doctoral Students

Last year, PDPA expanded to offer resources and programming specifically for doctoral students. To carry out these efforts, the PDPA team now includes a staff member who supports professional development for doctoral students, and PDPA jointly reports to the Office of Graduate Affairs and the Office of Research.

Workshops

We offered a variety of workshops for doctoral students focusing on areas of particular need. Prior to the move to remote instruction PDPA offered two in person workshops: “Professional Communication: The Basics of Email for Work” and “Project Management for the Humanities.” After the transition online PDPA partnered with the Center for Teaching and Learning to offer the virtual workshop “Translating In-Person Teaching Strategies Online” to current Teaching Fellows and those offering their own courses online in the Summer. In partnership with the Educational Resource Center, we offered a Virtual Writing Strategies Series, with five sessions focused on common trouble areas in writing dissertations, articles, proposals, and seminar papers. PDPA also collaborated with BU’s BEST and CELL-MET to organize a Career Panel with PhDs in industry and academia, which was followed up by a series of virtual workshops related to career planning.

Drop-In Hours

Offered remotely in April, May and June, drop-in hours provide students with a space to ask PDPA staff questions, receive professional development advice, and learn about available resources.

Professional Development Grants

Although BU offers many professional development opportunities for doctoral students through departments, offices, and organizations, we recognize that external opportunities often arise that have the potential to significantly benefit students’ professional growth. The professional development grant program was established to provide financial support for such opportunities. Each review cycle, two grant recipients will be selected and awarded \$500 to cover or supplement the cost of their proposed professional development activities.



bu.edu/grad/career-development/phd-professional-development

Vitamin PhD Podcast

We created the Vitamin PhD podcast to provide another way for doctoral students at BU and beyond to engage in professional development and form a community. Season 1 of the podcast is available on Apple Podcasts and Spotify. Season 2 was released in early Summer 2020. Listeners can access additional information about the podcast at bu.edu/vitaminphd, as well as on Twitter, @BUvitaminphd.

The podcast features two different episode series. In Career Pathways episodes, we help doctoral students explore career options by interviewing people who have earned their doctorate and now work in a variety of sectors. In Navigating Challenges episodes, we discuss issues that can present difficulties in graduate school, and we provide tips to help doctoral students succeed. Doctoral students who are interested in serving as a guest host on the show can submit a pitch through our website.



Episode 5: Navigating Mental Health & Balance

Episode 6: Navigating Team Dynamics

Episode 7: Pathways to Science Academia

Episode 8: Navigating Careers in Non-Profit Orgs

Episode 9: Navigating Careers in Science Policy



TEAM MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: Sasha Goldman

Sasha is the Program Manager for doctoral student professional development. Sasha comes to PDPA after completing her PhD in the History of Art & Architecture at BU in the spring of 2020. Sasha is responsible for developing and facilitating workshops for doctoral students, partnering with University

stakeholders to create resources and promote career exploration opportunities for current BU PhDs. Sasha is also overseeing the new direction for future seasons of the Vitamin PhD podcast, which will include more current student voices and spotlight conversations with BU PhD Alumni.



AGEP National Research Conference

One of the grant funded programs within PDPA is a National Science Foundation Alliance for Graduate Education and the Professoriate (AGEP) award, focused on improving the climate within academia for traditionally underrepresented minority doctoral students and postdocs. Our team received an additional award this year to host the annual AGEP National Research Conference. This meeting will be focused on community development, dissemination of research, and fostering critically engaging learning environments.



Due to the outbreak of COVID-19 in the United States, our team postponed the conference from its original dates in March 2020, and will now host a two-part conference consisting of live-virtual (November 2020) and live-in-person conference (summer 2021) formats.

The AGEP 2020 Conference highlights diversity in STEM initiatives using a social justice education lens. For the AGEP, Boston University, and greater Boston STEM communities, the AGEP 2020 two-part conference is a catalyst for changing the status quo of STEM graduate education, academy community development, and learning at conferences. Accompanied by a community-based research agenda, the 2020 conference delves into the short and long term impacts of innovative learning pedagogies to conference planning and assessment.



TEAM MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: dana n. dunwoody

dana joined PDPA in August 2019 as a Postdoctoral Associate, bringing pedagogical and conference planning expertise to the team. dana leads the ongoing planning, management, monitoring, and evaluation of the conference programming and research

agendas. As a “meta member” of the PDPA team, dana also contributes and supports the office’s efforts around programming for postdoctoral professional development and events through her participation and feedback.



Provost's Mentor Fellows Program

Mentoring relationships between faculty and doctoral students and postdoctoral scholars across all fields foster the development of innovative scholarship and the creation of new knowledge. These relationships are also critical to shaping the independence of these early career scholars.

This year, PDPA launched the Provost Mentor Fellows program, designed to promote and highlight faculty excellence in mentoring across the University. Twenty faculty across nine Schools and Colleges were selected to participate in our inaugural cohort-based learning community. All of these faculty were committed to deepening their mentoring practices, identifying new mentoring strategies, and developing a mentoring plan.

The Mentor Fellows met seven times throughout the academic year in workshops covering a variety of topics, including: setting goals and expectations, providing effective feedback, managing difficult conversations, culturally aware mentoring, and supporting student and postdoc well-being and mental health. Each faculty member also completed a self-assessment before and after participating in the program to allow them to reflect on their skill development and growth as mentors.



Quick Stats

20

Total Fellows

9

Schools/
Colleges

7

Sessions

4

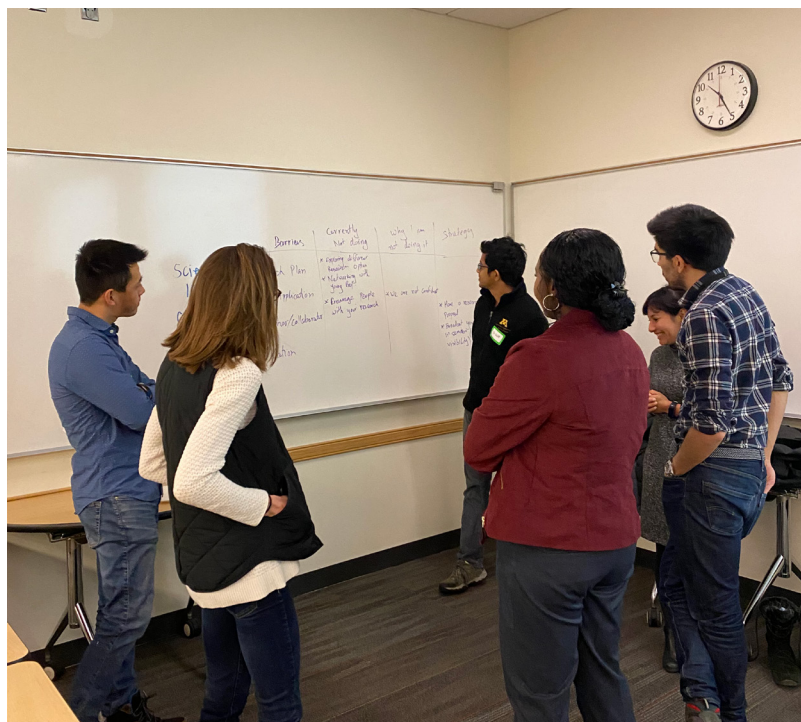
Chairs/Prog.
Directors

12

Hours

9

Assistant
Professors



Summary

Our mission is to ensure that Boston University provides a supportive and competitive environment for doctoral and postdoctoral scholarship and training.

Professional Development

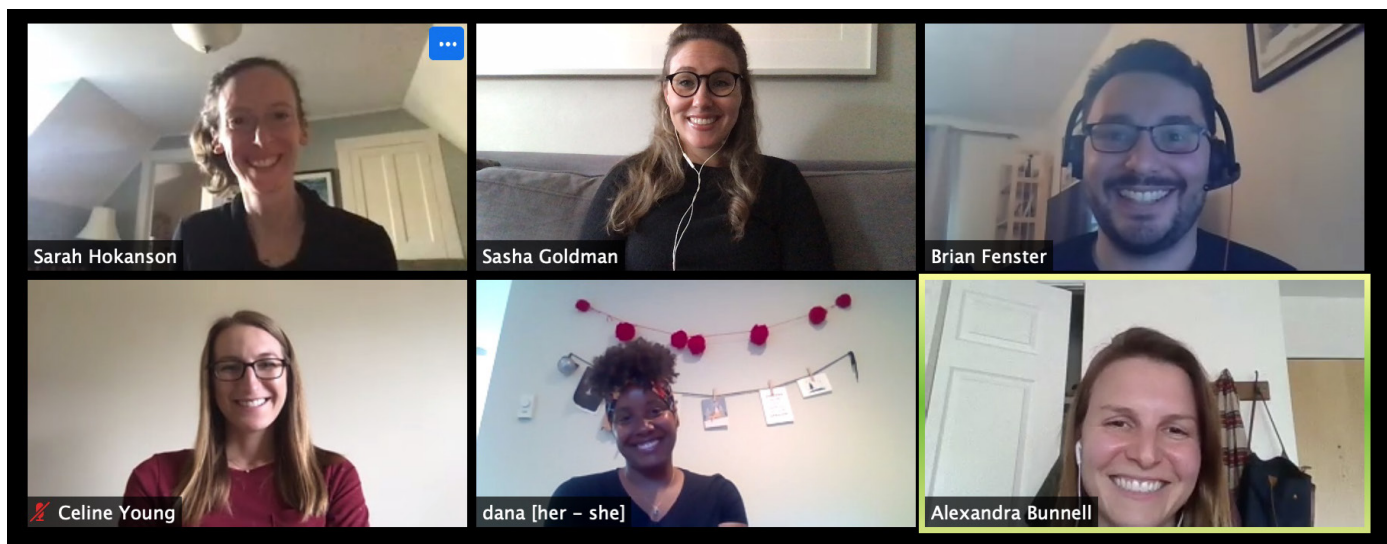
- In-person workshops, digital course content, and podcast episodes
- Travel awards
- Business cards
- One-on-one advising

Postdoc Appointments & Onboarding

- Offer letters
- Postdoc guidebook resource
- In-person and virtual orientation sessions
- Non-employee / trainee benefits

Creating Community

- Family-friendly events
- Social events
- Wellness programs
- Postdoc association (BUPDA)



Connect with PDPA



In Person

Charles River Campus:
1 Silber Way, Room 909,
Boston, MA 02215

Medical Campus:
72 E. Concord Street,
Boston, MA 02118



Online

bu.edu/postdocs
bu.edu/grad
postdocacademy.org
bu.edu/vitaminphd



On Twitter

[@postdocacademy](https://twitter.com/postdocacademy)
[@buvitaminphd](https://twitter.com/buvitaminphd)



BOSTON UNIVERSITY
Professional Development & Postdoctoral Affairs
One Silber Way, Ninth Floor
Boston, MA 02215

bu.edu/postdocs
postdocs@bu.edu
gradpd@bu.edu

