Postdocs in the Humanities and Social Sciences

What They Are and How to Get One
Goals for this Session

UNDERSTAND the role of a postdoc
LOCATE postdoc opportunities
APPLY with knowledge and confidence
What is a postdoc in the humanities or social sciences?
Postdocs 101

- Appointments of 1 to 3 years
- Low teaching loads
- Resources for travel and research
- Networking opportunities
- Professionalization opportunities

You should be more than a source of labor
Postdoc Rate by Field of Study: 1992–2012

Source: Survey of Earned Doctorates
Postdoc Typology

Society of Fellows

Thematic
Skill Based
Teaching Oriented

Diversity
Project Based
You + ________ = Job
You + Postdoc = Job
Where can I find postdoctoral fellowship opportunities?
Humanities and Social Sciences Postdocs 2015-16

Postdoctoral Positions

ACLS Public Fellows Competition for Recent PhDs (USA) - Deadline: 24 March 2016 - FINALISTS NOTIFIED

ACLS invites applications for the sixth competition of the Public Fellows program. This year, the program will place up to 21 recent PhDs from the humanities and humanistic social sciences in two-year staff positions at partnering organizations in government and the nonprofit sector. Fellows will participate in the substantive work of these organizations and receive professional mentoring. Fellows receive a stipend of $65,000 per year, with individual health insurance and up to $3,000 to be used toward professional development activities over the course of the fellowship term.
University of Virginia, Law Library

Postdoctoral Research Fellowship in Digital Humanities

Institution Type: College / University
Location: Virginia, United States
Position: Post-Doctoral Fellow

The University of Virginia Law Library invites applications for a Postdoctoral Research Fellowship in Digital Humanities beginning August 8, 2016 and ending June 30, 2017. This position is renewable for up to two years and offers compensation of $50,000 plus health insurance. The successful candidate will contribute to the digital humanities efforts at the University of Virginia Law School and pursue his/her independent research.

Candidates must have sound familiarity with archival methods, digital collections management, website development, and historical research. The Fellow will work primarily with materials housed within the Law Library’s Special Collections, targeting items for digitization while conceptualizing and developing web-based digital exhibitions. These exhibitions will be engaging and focused projects with special attention to cultural, legal, and political frameworks. In addition, the Fellow will attend relevant library and technology conferences with the expectation he/she will develop workshops and presentations for showcasing the library’s digital humanities efforts to the wider scholarly community.
Other Places to Check

- Disciplinary Organizations (MLA, AAA)
- Institutional Websites
- Minority Postdoc (minoritypostdoc.org)
- General Higher Education Job Boards

**Deadlines: October through March**
How can I craft a competitive postdoc application?
Application Elements

- Cover Letter
- Curriculum Vitae
- Research Proposal
- Course Description
- Writing Sample
- Recommendations
Application Elements

- Cover Letter
- Curriculum Vitae
- Research Proposal
- Course Description
- Writing Sample
- Recommendations
It’s not about YOU.
It’s about THEM.
Research Proposals

- Problem
- Solution
- Evidence
- Timeline
Step 1: The Problem

- Begin with a widely recognized problem
  - Practical or conceptual
  - Related to the postdoc theme

- Mention literature, briefly
  - Others have not solved the problem

- Return to an unresolved question
  - Where you will make your mark
Step 2: The Solution

- Your research to the rescue
  - Outline your project and argument
  - Show how you are solving the problem

- The postdoc is part of the solution
  - It allows you to do important work
Step 3: The Evidence

- Substantiating details
  - Methodology
  - Sources
  - Literature review
  - Scholarly contribution

- You’ve got what it takes!
Step 4: The Timeline

- Feasible month-by-month plan
  - Additional research or data collection
  - Book proposals and revisions
  - Article submissions
  - Conference presentations

- Institutions want proximate glory
Application Elements

- Cover Letter
- Curriculum Vitae
- Research Proposal
- Course Description
- Writing Sample
- Recommendations
Postdoc Cover Letter

- **DO**
  - Follow the style rules for an academic cover letter
  - Tailor your project’s contribution to the theme
  - State your timeline and research outputs
  - Tailor your teaching to the theme
  - Discuss contributions to campus intellectual life

- **DO NOT**
  - Appear opportunistic
  - Pander
  - Go onto a third page
Course Description

- Must align with the fellowship’s purpose
  - Digital humanities = textual media course
  - Ecocriticism = African nature writers course
  - Islamic art = gender in Islamic art course

- Thoughtfulness and specificity matter
  - Topics, questions, goals, texts, assignments
Other Application

- **CV**
  - Emphasize teaching, research, or themes as appropriate

- **Writing Sample**
  - Relevant to the postdoc’s focus

- **Letters of Recommendation**
  - Ask recommenders for targeted letters
It’s not about YOU.
It’s about THEM.
Post-Application

- Multidisciplinary committee meets
- Committee evaluates materials
  - Clarity, relevance, significance, and feasibility
- Committee holds interviews
  - Interview process varies
  - On-campus, Skype, or phone
  - Depends on funding
- Committee decides and seeks approval
During Your Postdoc

- **DO NOT**
  - Get too comfortable
  - Loose sight of the big picture
  - Sit alone in your office

- **DO**
  - Create a writing plan
  - Advance your research
  - Network with colleagues
  - Seek mentorship
  - Seek feedback on teaching
  - Build marketable skills
2-Year Postdoc Plan

- **Fall Semester, Year 1**
  - Apply for jobs
  - Revise dissertation research
  - Forge campus contacts
  - Seek teaching feedback
  - Seek a letter writer
- **Spring Semester, Year 1**
  - Interview for jobs
  - Finish dissertation revisions
  - Submit articles
  - Submit book proposal

- **Fall Semester, Year 2**
  - Apply for jobs
  - Finish book/article revisions
  - Conceptualize a new project
  - Seek funding for new project
- **Spring Semester, Year 2**
  - Interview for jobs
  - Begin work on a new project

Make a plan that suits you
make it work.
Questions?

Courtney Wiersema
cwiersema@uchicago

Appointments
gradcareers.uchicago.edu