

Early Career Professional Development Committee Report

June 2024

Committee members:

Eli Hartung (Student rep), Joshua Felton (Student rep), Miranda Sinnott-Armstrong (2024), Ben Blackman (2024), Jill Spear (2025), Min Ya (2025), Christopher Krieg (2026)

Events (July 2023-July 2024)

- **GRFP workshop (fall 2023)**

In these workshops, we divided students into groups in order to work together (virtually) to improve their GRFP applications. Each group consisted of ~4-6 students working with two mentors, typically a senior mentor (usually a professor, postdoc) and a peer mentor (a grad student who recently received a GRFP). At the beginning of the series, an NSF program officer (Sally O'Connor) presented on the GRFP application process. Throughout the remainder of the series, groups met 2-3 times and exchanged drafts of the personal and research statements. In all, 33 students participated and 12 mentors graciously volunteered their time.

- **How to be a successful BSA Student Rep (Jan 26, 2024)**

This event, organized by the current student reps (Josh Felton and Eli Hartung) who are also members of the ECPCD committee, discussed the position of student representative for BSA. They hosted a virtual Q&A session to address questions that students interested in becoming student reps might have, especially related to the position description, requirements, and election process.

- **Fulbright webinar (April 29, 2024)**

Dr. Nishi Rajakaruna, a Fulbright US Scholar and Alumni Ambassador, as well as Professor of Botany at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, discussed the process of applying for Fulbright grants, particularly for those beyond the student level. He also discussed his experiences as a Fulbright recipient to two different countries, and the benefits of the regional travel program grants that Fulbright also offers to support networking and travel to countries that are near the host country. He will be offering "office hours" at the Botany 2024 meeting for anyone interested in applying, where he will be available to discuss individual projects and applications with (prospective) applicants. There were 17 attendees at the original Fulbright webinar.

- **New PI webinar: Now you're a new PI, what's next? (May 2024)**

The targeted audiences of this webinar are new PIs, who just accepted offers, negotiated terms, and now trying to start a lab and get things going, and this webinar aims to discuss the logistics, challenges & surprises of setting up a new research group and how to navigate through one's first year as a new PI. We recognized the necessity for such a webinar because the skills required to be a "manager" and a "leader" of a research group are often absent from the academic training of early-career scientists. We have invited four panelists, all

assistant professors, to share their experiences as new PIs and impart insights gained from their initial years as group leaders.

Very excitingly, this is the first webinar of a series that the Early Career Professional Development Committee of BSA collaborating with the Plant Postdocs, which is a self-organized early career researchers' platform that currently has ~400 members, ~9,000 twitter/X (@plantpostdocs) followers, and ~350 WeChat members. We are also happy to learn that the Plant Postdocs are interested in establishing a long-term relationship with the committee. Furthermore, we are planning additional webinars throughout the year to foster connections and provide resources for early-career scientists interested in academic or industry positions.

Plans for events in the 2024-2025 academic year:

Fall 2024:

- GRFP workshops
- “Now you get an offer, what’s next?” webinar, as an extension of the “Now you’re a new PI, what’s next?” focusing on negotiating offer letters

Other events and topics:

- Another “Careers in Botany” panel on a new topic/job category — previous iterations have covered government jobs, and herbarium jobs. Some topics that have been suggested: PUI institutions, botanic gardens, conservation organizations, industry.
- PRFB and other postdoc fellowship writing groups
- Job application writing groups