

**MRS Bulletin**

## Calling all postdocs ...

Professional societies, such as the Materials Research Society (MRS), are making strides toward helping postdocs in their careers. MRS has instituted postdoctoral awards and other opportunities to engage postdocs, including involvement in various volunteer activities within MRS, publications, and conferences.

The *MRS Bulletin* Postdoctoral Publication Prize was initiated in 2017. It differs from the MRS Postdoctoral Award by emphasizing scientific writing and communication, in addition to research excellence and the required demonstrated interest in the scientific publication process. After all, this is one of the missions of *MRS Bulletin*: to encourage and promote scientific writing and communication.

We were pleasantly surprised last year when the inaugural Prize rendered close to 120 applications and nominations. The candidates were outstanding, and the accomplishments of many of the applicants and nominees were remarkable. We had a difficult time selecting the recipient. Ultimately, the Prize went to Andy Tay of Stanford University for his outstanding academic credentials, impressive list of scientific publications, and, most importantly, his science communication efforts.

The application and nomination window for the 2018 *MRS Bulletin* Postdoctoral Publication Prize is currently open with a deadline of July 31. The prize consists of a \$2000 cash award, a profile published in *MRS Bulletin*, a complimentary one-year membership to MRS, and an invitation to publish in *MRS Bulletin*. We acknowledge the Jiang Family Foundation and MTI Corporation for their generous contribution to support this Prize.

If you are a current postdoc and have been so for at least six months (but not more than five years post-PhD), consider submitting an application. If you have postdocs working in your group, encourage them to apply or, alternatively, you can nominate them. I want to reiterate the requirement of interest in science writing and communication, as demonstrated by peer-reviewed publications, various forms of writing, editing activities, as well as outreach and other relevant efforts.

Postdocs occupy an interesting position in the scientific research enterprise. The postdoctoral position offers a bridge from

graduate student to fully independent researcher. Postdoc positions serve many roles both for researchers and research groups, as well as for the postdocs themselves, whether in universities, industry, or national labs. As a former postdoc at a national lab, I appreciate the opportunities afforded me in the path to becoming an independent researcher and in providing a career direction. Many postdocs occupy critical roles in research groups through their skills and expertise, especially in multidisciplinary, cross-cutting materials research.

The postdoc position also is comprised of challenges. Stressors include the need to obtain a permanent position, publishing in prestigious journals, financial matters, and family issues. Obtaining a postdoc position in another country also can be difficult. The number of postdocs in science and engineering has continued to grow over the last two decades, increasing competition for postdoc positions and subsequent (full-time and permanent) academic and other research positions. There have been calls to professionalize the postdoc position to change it to a true career role. Many postdocs move on to satisfying non-research careers (just don't call them alternative or nontraditional!). The solution for many of these challenges may lie in making major changes to the overall research enterprise.

Organizations, including MRS, realize it is important to advocate for postdocs by providing a voice for the education of future scientific leaders. There are special focus issues for early career researchers in MRS journals that are aimed at postdocs, both as editors and authors, as well as special symposia at MRS meetings. *MRS Bulletin* periodically conducts science writing workshops, with many participants being postdocs.

And the *MRS Bulletin* Postdoctoral Publication Prize is another step in this effort.

**Gopal R. Rao**Editor, *MRS Bulletin*  
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Deadline**5:00 pm (ET)  
July 31, 2018[www.mrs.org/  
bulletin-prize](http://www.mrs.org/bulletin-prize)