

GRADUATE JOURNAL

On the cards

Before I obtained my first set of business cards, I considered them to be accessories only for business people or perhaps the overly career savvy — certainly not necessary for a graduate student like myself. But I changed my mind when I became involved in the student association during my studies. I realized then that cards were an essential way to market the organization.

Now I see business cards as an essential tool in networking. I try to enhance their value by adding information; writing down the subject of the conversation on the card that accompanied its exchange is a good way to remember key points, and ensure you follow up with the person who gave you the card. And after follow-up, a marked-up card serves as a good archive of the initial meeting and actions taken as a result of it.

At conferences and workshops, it seems as though graduate students vary in their approach to business cards. Some have them and exchange them, others don't. I would encourage students to get a set printed — with a simple design and basic contact information. And finally, get comfortable approaching colleagues and swapping cards. ■

Philipp Angerer is a second-year PhD student in biotechnology at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) in Zurich, Switzerland.

First, find your postdocs...

When I arrived at Georgetown University (GU) in Washington in 2001, I went to have my photo taken for a university discount card. The clerks asked my name, and whether I was a student. I told them I was a postdoctoral fellow and they responded with a blank stare. Then they asked me if I taught classes, which would qualify me as a faculty member. Clearly, this was the first that they had heard the word postdoc. This incident was telling. In starting up a postdoc organization, the most difficult task is simply finding the postdocs. Most are not considered to be 'real' university employees, so they are lost in translation somewhere between the accounting office and the lab, never making it to human resources.

After attending the inaugural National Postdoctoral Association (NPA) meeting in Berkeley, California, last year, I began establishing the Georgetown University Postdoctoral Association (GUPDA) with the help of my co-chair, Paul Lea. By far the most difficult task continues to be identifying the names of GU postdocs. To find them, we had to come up with some creative strategies.

We started with a list of 20 or so postdocs in my department and asked the university for enough money to hold a barbecue. We posted flyers that didn't give the location, but which asked for an RSVP. This way, we accumulated the e-mail addresses of a lot more postdocs. About 50 postdocs came, and we collected more e-mails.

One by one I added the names and e-mail addresses to an e-mail list server. Within three months the group had grown to more

than 200 postdocs, with half of them turning out for our biggest barbecue yet. Through networking, creating the e-mail list and continuing to post flyers for events, we have expanded our base.

Next we created a website, rallied support from faculty members and high-level administrators, and became a chartered organization. Now that we are 'official', we've found that the difficulty of finding all postdocs on campus rolls over to two other challenges — getting postdocs involved in the organization, and keeping it alive after Paul and I leave. Both could be even more difficult than knowing the exact number of postdocs at GU — a question that remains unanswered. ■

Lille Tidwell is a neuroscience postdoc at Georgetown University Medical Center and chair of the Georgetown University Postdoctoral Association.

♦ <http://gupda.georgetown.edu>

MOVERS

Zhenan Bao, Associate Professor of Chemical Engineering, Stanford University, California



Arriving in the United States from China in 1990, Zhenan Bao felt a sense of urgency to complete her education. "As an immigrant, I wanted a US degree as soon as possible so I could start my career here." Since she had family in the Chicago area, she moved there. She already had a strong background in engineering from her education in China and an interest in polymers fostered by a summer programme at Nanjing University.

She learned that, with her existing education, she could get into graduate school at Chicago University without completing a BS. By a stroke of luck,

Luping Yu, an expert in polymer chemistry, had also recently arrived. Bao says she was fortunate because Yu was the only polymer chemist in the university at the time.

After her PhD with Yu, she had to choose between a temporary fellowship at the University of California, Berkeley, and a permanent position at Bell Labs. Bao's long-term goal was academia, but she decided on Bell Labs, with its basic research emphasis and history of publishing. "People told me, if you go to Bell labs, you can still go into academia later," she says.

Good mentoring again made the difference. At Bell Labs, manager Elsa Reichmanis, currently director of the materials research department, told her to take her time and "just talk to people and decide what you want to work on". That flexibility, friendly and helpful colleagues, and having a female mentor in a male-dominated discipline helped

Bao find her bearings. "It is important to see a woman being successful." Bao was impressed that Reichmanis was able to excel at Bell, gain membership of the US National Academy of Engineering, serve as the American Chemical Society president, and still raise four children. Other mentors at Bell Labs included Andy Lovinger, now at the polymer division of the National Science Foundation, and Ed Chandross.

Bao took Reichmanis's advice and soon found a project in plastic transistors where she could use her knowledge in a different application. "I thought my background would allow me to contribute to that project immediately," Bao says.

She didn't feel ready to move back to academia until a year ago. Now she is comfortable having made the jump and is guiding graduate students. And she aims to help them the way her many mentors helped her. ■

CV **1995–2003:** Research scientist, Bell Labs, Lucent Technologies, New Jersey
2001–present: Honorary professor, Department of Chemistry, East China University of Science and Technology, Shanghai
1995: University of Chicago, PhD, chemistry