

AAAS Fellows Focus Group on Graduate and Postdoctoral Researcher Financial Support

NSF/NIH/CGS Workshop
Presented by Dan Stanzione
AAAS/NSF Fellow
June 17, 2004

Who Attended?

- About 25 AAAS Fellows
- Distribution:
 - New PhD graduates
 - Finished Postdoc
 - Faculty on Sabbatical
 - Faculty making mid-career changes

Format

- A panel outlining issues
 - Bob Barnhill, Bianca Bernstein (NSF), Wally Schaffer (NIH), Peter Syverson (CGS)
- Fellows were asked to respond to questions such as:
 - Impact of grad/postdoc stipends on career choice?
 - How much time/energy spent securing funding year-year?
 - What would your priorities be in a flat federal budget?

Main Themes of Responses

- The impact of stipends is asymmetric. Stipends **can** drive people away if they are too low to meet a minimum standard of living (rent, food), but having slightly higher stipends did not/would not have changed their career decisions
 - “Minimum standard” has geographical variations. Boston, Chicago, San Francisco, etc require more.
- Health care is part of a minimum standard. They were largely bewildered that this wasn't established fact.
 - Most had colleagues with horror stories

Main Themes (cont.)

- The single largest factor in their decisions to pursue, or continue to pursue, research careers had less to do with stipend than future financial uncertainty. This manifested in two ways:
 - Uncertainty within PhD programs: How many years will I have to live like this? What is required to finish this?
 - Uncertainty post-graduation: The postdoc process seemed murky and unending, with no clear path to success at the end. Would they **ever** be financially secure in this career
- Comparisons were drawn to professional schools, where career paths and reward seemed much better defined