



**Boston University** Professional Development & Postdoctoral Affairs



# Resilience and Adaptation

*Annual Report | FY2021*

# PDPA By the Numbers

**342**

Postdoctoral scholars  
(42 non-employee,  
300 employee)

**81**

Advising  
appointments for  
postdocs

**60**

Events for postocs  
and doctoral students

**\$2M+**

Grants won by  
postdocs

**60**

Postdocs attended  
PDPA orientation

**1,924**

Participants enrolled  
in Inclusive STEM  
Teaching Project

**5,000**

Registrants for Postdoc  
Academy

**370**

Attended AGEF  
National Research  
Conference

**10**

Fellows in Provost  
Menor's Fellows  
Program



**2,500+**

Downloads of Vitamin  
PhD Podcast

**1,000+**

Doctoral students and  
postdocs attended  
events

## TEAM MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: Alexandra Bunnell

Alexandra is the PDPA Program Manager. She works on the PDPA website to make all the resources for postdocs easier to find. She also organizes the postdoc orientation, manages the non-employee benefits

program, all PDPA communications, and handles postdoc data requests. She also helped transition non-employee postdocs to payroll, to help make their stipends and benefit reimbursements easier to receive.



# Overview

**Boston University** is committed to providing a supportive and competitive training environment for doctoral and postdoctoral research and scholarship. Professional Development & Postdoctoral Affairs (PDPA) offers programs, resources, and services across both our Charles River and Medical Campus that are tailored to meet the specific needs of doctoral students, postdoctoral scholars (postdocs) and their faculty mentors.

Highlights from this year include the launch of a microcredentialing platform for PhD students called the PhD Pathways, funded by BU's Digital Education Incubator. We also produced two new massive open online courses - our second Postdoc Academy course called Building Skills for a Successful Career, and a course focused on Inclusive STEM Teaching. Finally, a new paper highlighting our expertise in program evaluation was published in Evaluation and Program Planning.

*from the desk of the assistant provost*

## Finding our stride

Our hybrid work environment did not limit our creativity this year; it feels like this year was our busiest yet. As our on-campus events begin to emerge, I am really looking forward to reconnecting with more members of our community in-person. But many of the virtual tools that we tried during the pandemic were effective, especially since our audience is full of busy folks juggling a lot of things! Postdocs and PhD students will still be able to message us on Slack, attend virtual live workshops or office hours, and enjoy our self-paced learning

opportunities in addition to the in-person events we have planned.

Three new team members joined PDPA and have hit the ground running, embedded in projects that are creating exciting new professional development opportunities for PhD students, postdocs, and faculty. I am also pleased and grateful that so many PhD students and postdocs have lent their time to working on projects within our office this year, from developing seasons of our Vitamin PhD podcast to continuing to provide

ways for postdocs to socialize and meet new colleagues.

One of the proudest moments of my career so far was being recognized for my advocacy work by receiving the Graduate Women in Science and Engineering 2021 Advocate of the Year award. I hope it is always clear through my work and through the work of our office how committed our team is to ensuring our PhD students and postdocs have a fulfilling and positive training experience.



**Sarah Hokanson,  
Assistant Provost**

# Our Work on Campus

The work that we do connects to many University-wide initiatives and working groups that support graduate and postdoctoral training.

## AAU PhD Education Initiative

Our selection and participation in the Association of American Universities (AAU) PhD Education Initiative was supported with buy-in from the President and University Provost. In addition to financial resources and administrative support within the Office of Graduate Affairs to support our work in this program, six participating departments - Biology, Biostatistics, Classical Studies, Counseling Psychology and Applied Human Development, Pharmacology, and Sociology - are developing and implementing plans to make the full range of careers available to PhDs in their disciplines visible, viable, and valued by students and faculty.

## Taskforce on PhD Student Sick Leave

Boston University is committed to supporting the health and wellbeing of our PhD students, and has made strides in recent years to codify that commitment through policies that emphasize and draw attention to supporting students to take appropriate time away from their academic and scholarly responsibilities. Assistant Provost Hokanson led a task force charged with developing guidelines for PhD student sick leave. Recommendations describe the number of days per calendar year that should be granted to PhD students for sick leave, appropriate mechanisms for students to request short-term sick leave, who should be involved in finding coverage for research or teaching related responsibilities, and how disputes over sick leave should be mediated or resolved.

## Responsible Conduct of Research

Assistant Provost Hokanson became the Director of our Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) program for PhD students and postdocs in summer 2020. She has updated the RCR curriculum to integrate required RCR topics with themes such as social justice definitions, setting mentoring expectations, implicit bias, and managing difficult conversations effectively. Session activities also move beyond analyzing and responding to case studies to include activities that require students to develop and apply professional skills in critical thinking, self-awareness, and communication.

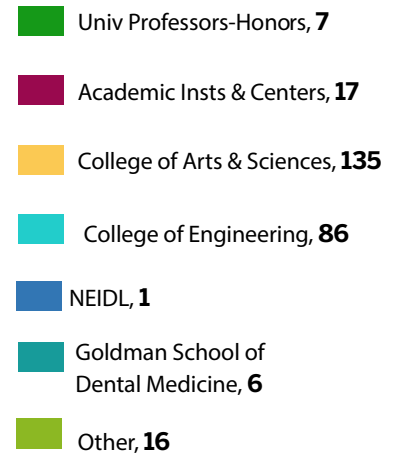
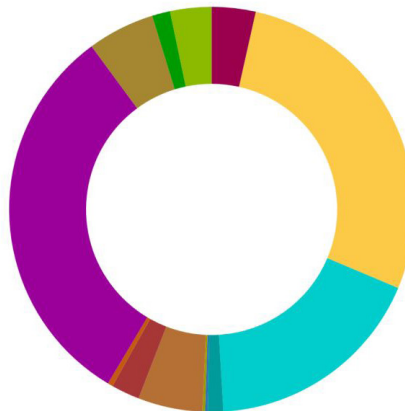
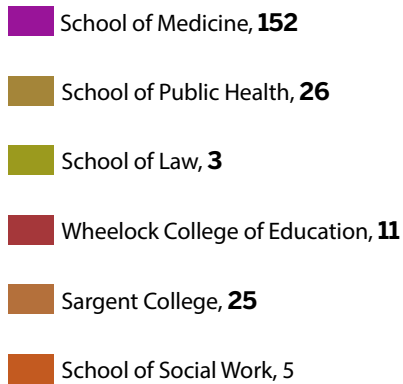
### Examples of sessions include:

Co-constructing authorship guidelines and developing strategies to hold researchers accountable to them

Participating in a social group formation simulation designed to highlight implicit biases

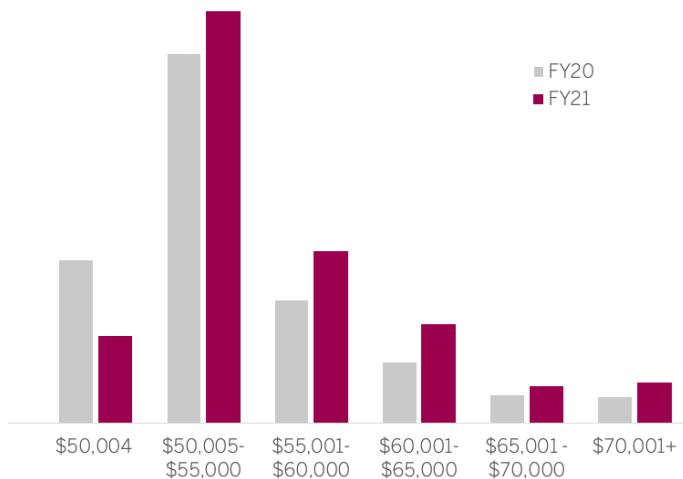
Role playing difficult conversations with faculty through applying improv techniques.

# BU Postdocs: At a Glance

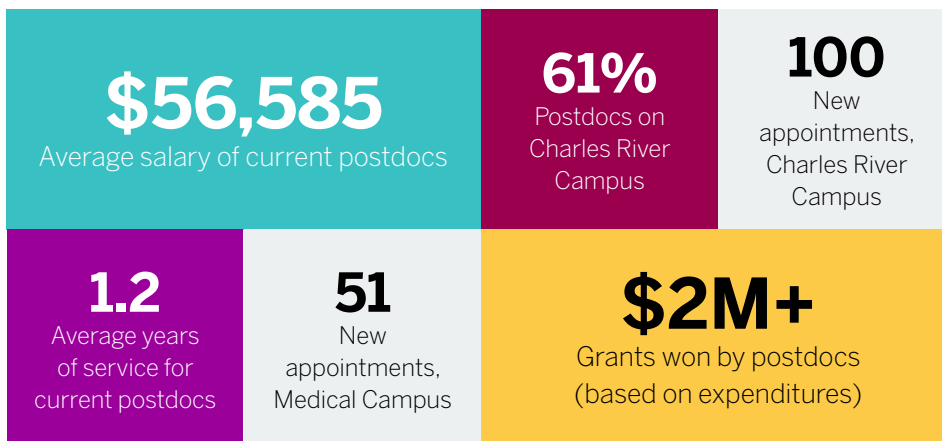


## Salary distribution

The minimum salary for postdocs in FY21 was \$50,004.



## Quick Stats



## COUNTRY OF ORIGIN

BU postdocs represent 52 countries. The most common countries of citizenship are:

United States **232**  
China **70**  
India **36**  
South Korea **13**

## RACE/ETHNICITY

White **232**  
Asian **167**  
Black **15**  
American Indian **1**  
Multiracial **2**  
Hispanic/Latino **25**

*Race data is unreported for 61 postdocs.*

# Creating Community for Postdocs

Professional development is at the heart of helping our postdocs realize their professional goals, and PDPA offers postdocs opportunities to build their skills through providing tools, resources, and workshop opportunities throughout the year.



## Workshops

The programming that we provide is focused on skill-building, specifically on the core competencies identified by the National Postdoctoral Association as being important for all postdocs – discipline-specific knowledge, research skill development, communication skills, professionalism, and leadership and management skills.

## Boston University Postdoc Association

The Boston University Postdoctoral Association (BUPDA) supports and advocates for postdocs, organizes events, and liaises with BU administrators, as well as other postdoctoral associations. The group is open to all postdocs on the Charles River and Medical Campuses.



## Professional Development Awards

Boston University is not the only source for professional development, and we encourage our postdocs to seek opportunities outside the University to network and enhance their skills. PDPA offers six professional development and travel awards per year to support postdocs to present their work at conferences or attend other professional development opportunities.

The BUPDA is actively involved in the Boston Postdoctoral Association (BPDA), which is a non-profit organization that includes postdoctoral representatives from Boston and Cambridge institutions. Postdocs from BUPDA are involved in the leadership BPDA, including its Presidency, Board of Directors, and Committee Chairs. They also participate actively in the organization of many events and data collection to the benefit of all Boston postdocs.



## Business Cards

Business cards are an essential networking tool for postdocs entering the job market or looking to expand their network of peers and mentors. To ensure all postdocs have access to this resource, PDPA works with postdocs to design and order one complimentary box of business cards.

# Postdoc Academy

Postdoc Academy is a comprehensive digital and in-person professional development program available to all postdocs to help them develop the transferable skills that will enable their success in a diverse set of careers.

The Postdoc Academy blends interactive online and in-person content built on the National Postdoctoral Association competencies to support skill development throughout postdoc training, from their orientation as a new postdoc to their next career step. Content covers joining a new community of practice, building an actionable career plan, developing work-life resilience, working in an intercultural environment, leadership, becoming a new supervisor, project management, applying teaching skills, strategic communications, and preparing job application materials.

Learning is self-paced, and the project's free programming includes two massive open online courses, open educational materials, in-person and virtual workshops, and supported learning communities (Postdoc Academy Learning Sessions, or PALS).



[postdocacademy.org](https://postdocacademy.org)



This collaborative initiative with Boston University, Northwestern University, Michigan State University, and University of Wisconsin- Madison is funded by the National Institutes of Health Grant No. R25121257.

## ***Succeeding as a Postdoc***

The project's first course, The Postdoc Academy: Succeeding as a Postdoc, continued to be offered in fall 2020 and spring 2021 on BUx. Postdocs also could join synchronous Postdoc Academy Learning Sessions at their institution or within their discipline. PALS supplements the online course by providing opportunities for deeper reflection of the material and connects postdocs to a supportive community of their peers.

## ***Building Skills for a Successful Career***

The project's new course, The Postdoc Academy: Building Skills for a Successful Career, launched in July 2021 and builds advanced skills to help postdocs navigate their career pathways. Live discussions and networking are available in the first and final weeks of the course for postdocs to engage with and ask questions to course instructors and professionals from various careers.

## **Quick Stats**

**96%**

Postdocs Would Recommend

**22**

Postdocs on Camera

**49**

Countries Represented

**5k+**

Registrants

# Professional Development for Doctoral Students

This year, PDPA continued to expand our resources and programming for doctoral students, working on aligning our offerings with the PhD Core Capacities and the PDPA strategic plan. To carry out these efforts we expanded our communication platforms and resources, including reorganizing the PDPA website to create a designated space for doctoral students, creating our Moderated Discussion events, and expanding our social media presence beyond Vitamin PhD.

[bu.edu/pdpa/for-doctoral-students](https://bu.edu/pdpa/for-doctoral-students)

## Workshops & Events

This year, we offered all of our workshops and events virtually. The workshops focused primarily on the areas of career development, management and leadership, self-awareness, and communication skills. Others, like the storytelling workshop for our “Things I Wish I Knew” project, organized in partnership with BU URBAN, gave students the tools and opportunity to work on communication skills through developing a short video shared on the Graduate Education website.

In an effort to build community during remote learning, we added a monthly PDPA trivia night, hosted by a current doctoral student. We also participated for the first time in the national Graduate and Professional Student Appreciation Week by hosting a series of wellness and community building for graduate and professional students.

## Quick Stats

**60**

Events for postdocs and doctoral students

**1,000+**

Event attendees

## Moderated Discussions

Together with the Office of the Associate Provost for Graduate Affairs, PDPA created the Moderated Discussions as an opportunity for regular communication and dialogue between doctoral students and University administrators. Over the past year we have held 5 moderated discussions on topics including learn from anywhere, the PhD Core Capacities, student health insurance, and the new PhD student sick leave policy.

## Professional Development Grants

The professional development grant program was established to provide financial support for external professional development opportunities. Two grant recipients were selected and awarded \$500 to cover or supplement the cost of their proposed professional development activities this year.

## Drop-In Hours

Offered remotely throughout the year, drop-in hours provide students with a space to ask PDPA staff questions, receive professional development advice, and learn about available resources.



# Vitamin PhD Podcast

The Vitamin PhD podcast was created in 2019 to provide another way for doctoral students at BU and beyond to engage in professional development and form a community.



Following seasons 1 and 2, each new season of Vitamin PhD has been hosted by a pair of current doctoral students at BU. Hosts research, plan, and produce a six-episode capsule season focusing on a topic aligned with current PDPA programming. Season 3 included conversations about the challenges of graduate school during COVID-19, with particular emphasis on mental health and wellness.

Season 4 followed up on the “21 Days of Unlearning Racism and Learning Anti-Racism” curriculum from Summer 2020. In conversations with student organizations, faculty members, and staff from across BU schools and colleges, the hosts discussed how these individuals and groups engage in social justice work within their communities. The episode’s conversations sought to guide listeners to resources that will enable them to create and sustain a daily, intentional effort to challenge inequity, and to build a more inclusive BU.

All seasons of the podcast are available on Apple Podcasts and Spotify, which enables a worldwide audience to access it. Listeners can access additional information about the podcast on our website, [bu.edu/vitaminphd](http://bu.edu/vitaminphd), and get updates via Twitter: @BUvitaminphd.

## Days of Unlearning Racism and Learning Anti-Racism

Following the Day of Collective Engagement hosted by BU in June 2020, our team led a 21-day program for doctoral students and postdocs as a way of contributing to the event and continuing our own actions in the days beyond it. The 21-day curriculum was inspired by work developed by Dr. Eddie Moore Jr., and provided structured learning for participants interested in engaging with thematically-organized anti-racist texts and multi-media each day over 3 weeks. We had 170 doctoral students, postdocs, faculty, and staff register to participate. Every five days we held a community space for folks to come together to reflect, to find support in their learning and unlearning, and to share additional resources.

## Quick Stats, Seasons 2-4

**18**

Episodes

**2.5k+**

Downloads

**163**

Downloads per  
Episode

## TEAM MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: Sasha Goldman

In her first year as Program Manager for doctoral student professional development, Sasha has vastly expanded the number of workshops and events offered by our office for doctoral students. She has also overseen the new direction for the Vitamin PhD podcast, and designed and executed the development of PhD Pathways,

the implementation of the PhD Core Capacities. This included working with the Digital Education Incubator to develop a successful funding proposal, the creation of a professional development curriculum for the PhD Pathways, and the piloting of the Badgr Pro Pathways platform for current BU PhDs.



# PhD Core Capacities and Progression

The PhD Core Capacities are a set of seven skills that build upon the learning outcomes that exist within doctoral programs across the University.

## PhD Core Capacities

The Core Capacities provide a framework for doctoral students to articulate the skills and knowledge gained through a PhD education to professional audiences. The capacities give doctoral students the language and resources to intentionally develop skills and select experiences based on the requirements of their programs, as well as the expectations and skill sets required for their desired career.



## PhD Progression

PhD Progression platform is an online digital-badge tracking platform and dashboard that allows BU doctoral students to track the development of skills and their achievement of learning goals connected to the seven core capacities. Through the acquisition of digital badges connected to activities and assessments recorded on the badgr Pro pathways platform, students develop a practice of career planning and lifelong learning.

We piloted the platform in Summer 2021 in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences (GRS) with the support of the Digital Education Incubator. For the pilot, we created 7 learning pathways, one for each capacity, with 67 available badges. We had 65 active PhD student participants in the pilot. In the three months of the pilot we awarded over 640 badges and students have completed over 50 pathways.

## TEAM MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: Dena Rezaei

Dena is a Postdoctoral Research Associate for PhD Professional Development. In her role, she collaborates with the PDPA team to develop, implement, research, and evaluate the doctoral professional development curriculum and online learning pathways. Before joining BU, she served as a Research Associate for

Center for Stem Learning, CU Boulder for supporting and promoting campus-wide educational transformation efforts toward improving teaching quality.



# AGEP National Research Conference

One of the grant-funded programs within PDPA is a National Science Foundation Alliance for Graduate Education and the Professoriate (AGEP) award, focused on improving the climate within academia for traditionally underrepresented minority doctoral students and postdocs. AGEP awardees develop, implement and study, via integrated educational and social science research, Alliance models to transform the dissertation phase of doctoral education, postdoctoral training and/or faculty advancement, of those that hold historically underrepresented racial identities in STEM and STEM education careers.



Our team received an additional award to host the 2020 and 2021 annual AGEP National Research Conferences. The AGEP National Research Conference advances knowledge about AGEP initiatives and disseminates the outcomes of the educational and social science research. Due to the pandemic, our team shifted our conference design from a two-day conference in 2020 to a series of virtual webinars focused on community development and learning that led up to conferences in November 2020 and June 2021.



We partnered with Events & Conferences to host an interactive poster session as well as our summer 2021 two day conference event. Recordings from the sessions can be found at <https://live.bu.edu/agep>.

## Quick Stats

9

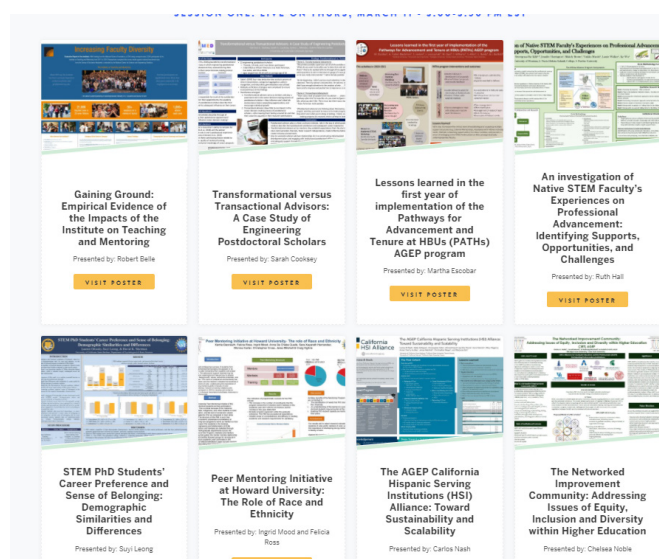
Events

370

Attendees

1

Publication

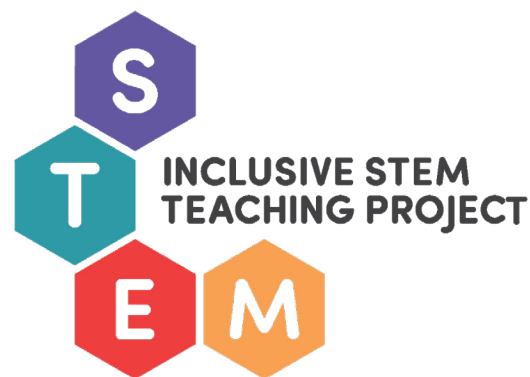


# Inclusive STEM Teaching Project

The Inclusive STEM Teaching Project, a National Science Foundation grant-funded program, is designed to advance the awareness, self-efficacy, and the ability of faculty, postdocs, and doctoral students to cultivate inclusive STEM learning environments for all their students.

The Inclusive STEM Teaching Project offers a six-week Massive Open Online course (MOOC) on edX. In this course, participants engage in deep reflection and discussions around topics of equity and inclusion in learning environments across a variety of institutional contexts. To center the identity of faculty and students, the content employs key features including: embodied case studies, affinity spaces, My Inclusivity Framework portfolio.

The primary sponsor for the Inclusive STEM Teaching Project is the National Science Foundation (NSF), Directorate for Education and Human Resources (EHR), and Division of Undergraduate Education (DUE). This project is supported under DUE grants 1821684; 1821571; 1821528; 1821510; 1821574. The project is a collaboration between Boston University, Northwestern University, University of Michigan, University of Georgia, University of Utah, University of Wisconsin - Madison, and Des Moines Area Community College.



[inclusivestemteaching.org](https://inclusivestemteaching.org)

## Quick Stats

**1,924**  
Total Enrolled

**588**  
Number  
Completed

**31%**  
Completion  
Rate

**9**  
Learning  
Communities

## TEAM MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: Lisa Himelman

Lisa Himelman is the Program Director for Outreach and Communications in Professional Development & Postdoctoral Affairs. In this role, Lisa oversees marketing and visibility efforts, develops engagement strategies, and provides operational

support for the Postdoc Academy (NIH grant funded) and Inclusive STEM Teaching Project (NSF grant funded). Lisa joined the PDPA team in March 2021. Prior to BU, she worked at Monmouth University in New Jersey for over a decade.



# Provost's Mentor Fellows Program

Mentoring relationships between faculty and doctoral students and postdoctoral scholars across all fields foster the development of innovative scholarship and the creation of new knowledge. These relationships are also critical to shaping the independence of these early career scholars.

PDPA has developed a model for mentor training called the Provost's Mentor Fellows program. This cohort-based program sponsored directly by the Provost meets monthly throughout the academic year to promote peer learning across disciplines, highlight mentoring successes among faculty, and collectively commit not just to updating personal strategies for mentorship, but towards enacting changes within others.

PDPA continued the Provost Mentor Fellows program despite the pandemic with faculty who were committed to deepening their mentoring practices, identifying new mentoring strategies, and developing a mentoring plan. Each faculty member also developed a project that represented their learning and skill development within the program. One example project this year focused on establishing a pilot program within the School of Medicine to integrate mentoring goals into the faculty annual performance evaluation process.



## Quick Stats

**10**

Total Fellows

**7**

Schools/  
Colleges

**20%**

Professors

**20%**

Chairs/Prog.  
Directors

**30%**

Associate  
Professors

**50%**

Assistant  
Professors



# Summary

Our mission is to ensure that Boston University provides a supportive and competitive environment for doctoral and postdoctoral scholarship and training.

## Professional Development

- In-person workshops, digital course content, and podcast episodes
- Travel awards
- Business cards
- One-on-one advising

## Postdoc Appointments & Onboarding

- Offer letters
- Postdoc guidebook resource
- In-person and virtual orientation sessions
- Non-employee / trainee benefits

## Creating Community

- Family-friendly events
- Social events
- Wellness programs
- Postdoc association (BUPDA)

## Research & Scholarship

Chesniak, O.M., Drane, D., Young, C., Hokanson, S.C., Goldberg, B.B. Theory of Change Models Deepen Online Learning Evaluation. 2021 Apr 15; 88:101945. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.evalprogplan.2021.101945>

Young, C., Chesniak, O.M., Drane, D., Campa, H., Green, N., Greenler, R., Maher, J.M., McGee, R., Nunez, A., Goldberg, B.B., Hokanson, S.C. (2020) Improving the design of an online course with virtual focus group feedback. F1000Research, 9:1191. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.12688/f1000research.26289.1>

Hokanson S.C., Grannan S., Greenler R., Gillian-Daniel, D.L., Campa, H., Goldberg, B.B. (2019) A Study of Synchronous, Online Professional Development Workshops for Graduate Students and Postdocs Reveals the Value of Reflection and Community Building. Innovative Higher Education, 44: 385–398. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10755-019-9470-6>

Hokanson, S.C. and Goldberg, B.B. (2018). Proactive postdoc mentoring. In A. J. Jaeger and A. J. Dinin (eds), The Postdoc Landscape: The Invisible Scholars. London, pp. 91–120. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-813169-5.00005-7>

## Connect with PDPA



### In Person

Charles River Campus:  
1 Silber Way, Room 909,  
Boston, MA 02215

Medical Campus:  
72 E. Concord Street,  
Boston, MA 02118



### Online

[bu.edu/postdocs](https://bu.edu/postdocs)  
[bu.edu/grad](https://bu.edu/grad)  
[postdocacademy.org](https://postdocacademy.org)  
[bu.edu/vitaminphd](https://bu.edu/vitaminphd)  
[inclusivestemteaching.org](https://inclusivestemteaching.org)



### On Social

[@postdocacademy](https://twitter.com/postdocacademy)  
[@buvitaminphd](https://twitter.com/buvitaminphd)  
[@inclusivestem1](https://twitter.com/inclusivestem1)  
[@BU\\_PhDs](https://twitter.com/BU_PhDs)

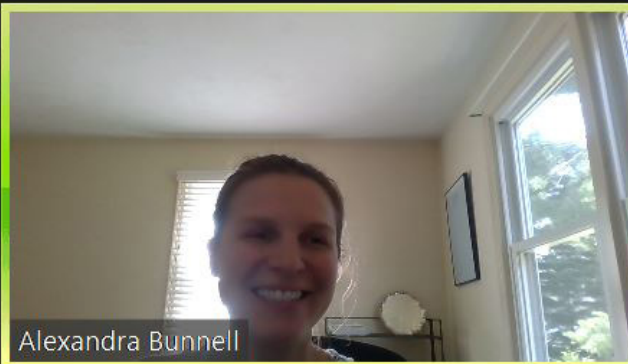


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Dena Rezaei



Alexandra Bunnell



Sarah Hokanson (she/her)



Lisa Himelman (she/her)



Sasha Goldman (she/her)