

NEWS

# *Spectrum* Launch: Fostering neurodiversity, promotions, grad school placements

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Hello, and welcome to the September issue of *Spectrum* Launch. This newsletter provides resources and guidance for early-career autism researchers. This month, we explore autistic researchers' experiences in academia — the challenges that many face, and what autistic and non-autistic researchers can do to make their institutions more supportive of neurodiversity.

“Autistic heaven” is how Sandra Jones, who is autistic herself, initially viewed a career in academic research. “Your entire job is to learn every minute fact about this thing that you’re interested in, and then tell other people,” she says she imagined.

That’s exactly how it was for Jones in the early days of her academic career — and she excelled. But as she ascended the academic ranks, the work became more challenging. Her schedule filled up with faculty meetings and paperwork, leaving less time for research, and she found herself overwhelmed by department politics that she didn’t care about or understand.

**Jones**, who is now pro vice-chancellor of research impact at Australian Catholic University in Melbourne, Australia, isn’t alone in that experience, she discovered after interviewing 37 autistic researchers about their careers for a **study** published last month in *Autism*. Autistic researchers across multiple countries and disciplines expressed love for their work but frustration with other aspects of academia that make the environment unpleasant or hostile for neurodivergent employees.

“You lose a lot of good people — because they burn out,” Jones says.

**[Read more here.](#)**

### Career tip:

- On networking: “I’m in the front row at conferences with my business card in my hand, flipped upside down. If someone brings up something in the room, I write down a question that I have. I try to pose the question during the session. But if I don’t have time, I’m the first one at the speaker’s elbow when he’s or she’s finished. I hand her the card, and I say, “I know we don’t have time to address this today, but I’d like to reach out to you,” says **Dena Gassner**, a graduate student at Adelphi University in Garden City, New York.

### Jobs and funds:

- The Autism Science Foundation seeks applications for its predoctoral, postdoctoral and post-undergraduate **fellowships**. Applications are due 9 December. And on 9 September, the foundation is hosting a Q&A session about the opportunities.
- Undergraduate students from underrepresented backgrounds who are interested in a career in the life sciences can apply for a scholarship from the **Diversification of Our Research Scientists (DOORS) program**, sponsored by the Wisconsin-based nonprofit BioPharmaceutical Technology Center Institute and biotech company Promega. Applications close 30 September.
- **Guoping Feng**’s lab at the McGovern Institute for Brain Research at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology is hiring a project manager. Applicants should have a Ph.D. and can apply **here**.
- Researchers looking for a tenure-track job in human genetics may want to check out **this opening** at the University of Utah. The deadline is 11 November.
- The Autism Science Foundation announced the recipients of its **Suzanne Wright Memorial Research Accelerator Grants**.
- **Mustafa Sahin**, professor of neuroscience at Harvard University, tweeted about a new job opening at Boston Children's Hospital:

Exciting opportunity in translational neuroscience! Rosamund Stone Zander Translational Neuroscience Center **@BostonChildrens** and **@harvardmed** has an ongoing search for new faculty member. Deadline is October 10th, 2022. For more info, please see **<https://t.co/cKwTJEHgUw>**

— Mustafa Sahin (@sahin\_m) **August 23, 2022**

### Recommended reads:

- The **fifth annual** Neuromatch Conference, an online meeting focused on computational neuroscience, is scheduled to take place 27 to 28 September.
- Grad school life can be lonely, but sharing those feelings with others, meeting up in person, and being patient helped researcher Jolene Tan find her place in her Ph.D. program, **she writes** in a new *Nature* Career Column.
- Early-career researchers are more likely to report that their relationship with their mentor has improved, rather than worsened, because of greater acknowledgement of systemic racism, according to a new **study** in the *Journal of Clinical and Translational Science*.
- When you're asking for a promotion, "**don't be modest**," tweeted **Sally-Anne Wherry**, senior lecturer in nursing at the University of Gloucestershire in the United Kingdom, in response to a request for advice. "You will be tempted to downplay your achievements. Don't."
- It's easy to get discouraged about academic life, but there are also plenty of things to **feel positive about**, tweeted **Lauren Ball**, associate professor at Griffith University in Queensland, Australia.

There are SO many positives of doing a **#PhD**! It can be easy to feel flooded with the negatives but this image highlights the many benefits of the phd process ????

<https://t.co/NZYZBk0BpP> [pic.twitter.com/qFxd69lzgr](https://t.co/qFxd69lzgr)

— Lauren Ball (@ProfLaurenBall) **August 3, 2022**

- Employers need to give scientists true permission, rather than just vague encouragement, to take breaks, according to a **recent column** in *Science*. "If you don't actually provide a means of stepping away that won't harm [researchers] professionally, then you're not giving them a gift, you're just creating evidence that you tried."
- Neuroscientists interested in learning the programming language Python may want to check out a **new resource** from **Mark Kramer**, professor of mathematics and statistics at Boston University. The "notebook" covers analysis of datasets from electroencephalography recordings to spike train data, as well as data visualization.
- Figuring out how to work independently isn't always easy. But asking for plenty of advice and picking a unique direction of research to pursue can help researchers find their own way forward, according to another recent **column** in *Science*.

Any suggestions for how to make this newsletter as useful as possible, or recommendations for what topic we should cover next? Send them to [angie@spectrumnews.org](mailto:angie@spectrumnews.org).

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