

PRESS RELEASE

LA JOLLA INSTITUTE EARNS TOP 2 SPOT IN NATION'S "BEST PLACES TO WORK FOR POSTDOCS"

Ranking Marks Institute's Second Straight Year Among Nation's Best Research Environments

SAN DIEGO - April 1, 2013 The La Jolla Institute for Allergy and Immunology has been ranked as the Number 2 best place to work in the nation for postdoctoral researchers, according to a survey conducted by The Scientist magazine. The Institute placed second only to the prestigious Whitehead Institute for Biomedical Research in Cambridge, Mass., which came in at Number 1.

The ranking marked the second straight year that the La Jolla Institute has been recognized on the U.S. list of "Best Places to Work for Postdocs," last year earning the Number 7 position.

The life science magazine's annual ranking was based on a U.S. survey of 2,081 postgraduate researchers, known in the scientific community as "postdocs." Postdocs have completed their doctoral degrees (Ph.D., M.D., or equivalent) and typically spend several years at a research institution, gaining training and experience under senior scientists. The survey covered workplace topics such as job satisfaction, communication, and career development.

Mitchell Kronenberg, Ph.D., La Jolla Institute's president & chief scientific officer, said he is very pleased at obtaining a top ranking once again. "Our 150 postdocs are a critical part of the research success of this Institute," says Dr. Kronenberg, adding that the Institute is a world leader in research focused on harnessing the power of the immune system to combat disease. "We appreciate their contributions and try to set a framework that gives them a valuable and enriching experience."

John Major, a prominent San Diego business executive and chairman of the Institute's Board of Directors, says it is not only the postdocs that apparently find the La Jolla Institute's environment inspiring. Along with ranking high nationally among postdocs, the Institute also scored a Number 6 place in the "Best Places to Work in Academia" survey in 2012, which polled more than 1,000 life scientists in academic or noncommercial research institutions worldwide. "When you see this kind of positive feedback from employees, coupled with the Institute's ranking among the world's top organizations for research impact in immunology, you realize that something special is going on at the La Jolla Institute," said Major. "We are fortunate to have an immunology leader of the Institute's caliber as a member of San Diego's world-renowned life science community."

Postdoctoral researchers interviewed cited many factors that make the La Jolla Institute's environment exceptional, including top-notch science, collaboration between labs, policies

that encourage rather than hinder novel scientific approaches, good benefits, excellent scientific resources, and a warm, friendly atmosphere that encourages interaction. “Everyone here is very accessible, including the faculty members,” says postdoc Shilpi Chandra, Ph.D., noting she was initially surprised by the Institute’s open environment. “There is a very collaborative spirit between all of the scientists. You can go and talk to anybody. It’s like a small family.”

Postdoc Kok-Fai Kong, Ph.D., echoes that sentiment. “We have ready access to senior faculty who are at the top of their field,” he says, noting that the Institute’s dedicated immunology focus enables it to attract many of the world’s best and brightest immunology researchers.

“You get this incredible feedback from phenomenal scientists and your work just excels because of that,” adds postdoc Aaron Tyznik, Ph.D. He also describes a pervasive positive attitude that fuels research excellence. “I’ve worked at other places where the atmosphere is oppressive and people are driven by fear. Here there’s a drive to help versus reprimand. You don’t have to be afraid to fail, which enables you to try innovative approaches and your research really grows.”

Postdoc Kok-Fai also points to a widespread feeling of camaraderie. “Everyone gets along. There’s no infighting between the labs. The faculty seem to want to help each other for the collective benefit of the science,” he says.

Amnon Altman, Ph.D., director of scientific affairs and a 22-year faculty member, says this friendly and cooperative atmosphere is a hallmark of the Institute and dates back to its early days. Kimishige Ishizaka, and his wife, Teruko Ishizaka, both M.D.s, Ph.D.s, were two world-renowned immunologists who arrived from John Hopkins University in 1989 to launch the Institute’s first laboratory operations. Kimi was the Institute’s first scientific director and later became president. “They instilled this philosophy of harmony and working together,” says Dr. Altman. “Even after they left (in 1996), their impact has carried through to today.”

Dr. Altman says this tradition is readily evident in current President, Dr. Kronenberg, whom he describes as a “wonderful” leader. “Mitch believes that it’s possible to do first rate, high-impact science in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere.” Dr. Altman also credits the exemplary faculty, the Institute’s relatively small size (about 350 employees), lack of bureaucracy and strong system of support for postdocs.

Dr. Kronenberg agrees, citing the Institute-funded Postdoc Association which provides opportunities for professional development and for organizing social and educational events. It also enables a structure for collectively articulating their concerns. “We listen to their needs,” he says. “A couple of years back, they brought up being included in the retirement plan and we instituted it.”

Over the years, the Institute has also created programs for career development, grant writing, presentation skills, employment benefits, and day-to-day work/life issues. The Institute hosts weekly in-house seminars enabling the postdoctoral fellows to present their research in an informal setting. Most recently, the Institute's Human Resources Department has initiated a number of wellness initiatives, including fitness classes, yoga, stress reduction classes, and various organized exercise, nutrition and other "challenges" to encourage healthier lifestyles.

In addition, the Institute launched its in-house Liaison Café in 2012. The cafe serves high quality, healthy catered meals two days per week, with costs subsidized to ensure competitive employee pricing. "Its purpose is two-fold," says Dr. Kronenberg. "We want to give the employees easy access to affordable, healthy meal choices on site and also to encourage employee interaction."

Along with the many tangible benefits, Institute leaders also make time to celebrate a job well done. "The faculty shows their appreciation for the postdocs in many ways," says Dr. Altman. "When a postdoc has a (scientific) paper accepted for publication, the mentoring faculty member often arranges a little party to toast the postdoc's success."

"I think they (the postdocs) get that the Institute really cares about them," adds Dr. Kronenberg. "We can't solve the NIH funding problems," he says, referring to the current sequestration budget debate in Congress. "But we can do our best to ensure that their experience here is positive and productive, so they can go forth and be successful."

The Top 10:

1. **Whitehead Institute for Biomedical Research** (Cambridge, MA)
2. **La Jolla Institute for Allergy and Immunology**
3. **Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation** (Oklahoma City)
4. **Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution** (Woods Hole, MA)
5. **Argonne National Laboratory** (Argonne, IL)
6. **The J. David Gladstone Institutes** (San Francisco)
7. **Scripps Institute of Oceanography**
8. **University of Alabama at Birmingham**
9. **Genentech** (South San Francisco)
10. **Brigham and Women's Hospital** (Boston)

About La Jolla Institute

Founded in 1988, the La Jolla Institute for Allergy & Immunology is a biomedical research nonprofit focused on improving human health through increased understanding of the immune system. Its scientists carry out research seeking new knowledge leading to the prevention of disease through vaccines and the treatment and cure of infectious diseases, cancer, inflammatory and autoimmune diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis, type 1

(juvenile) diabetes, Crohn's disease and asthma. La Jolla Institute's research staff includes more than 150 Ph.D.s and M.D.s. To learn more about the Institute's work, visit www.liai.org.

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