The Annual Report provides an overview of the activities and endeavors of the Northwestern University Postdoctoral Association (NUPA) between the dates of June 1, 2020 and May 31, 2021. In that time, NUPA revised its structure and bylaws to formalize activities and sub-committee format, expanded programming for postdoctoral trainees at Northwestern University, and increased engagement with postdoctoral trainees.

This Annual Report of NUPA was prepared by the following members of the NUPA Executive Committee for the 2020-2021 academic year:

- Kay-Marie Lamar: Co-Chair (Chicago campus)
- Cat Majors: Co-Chair (Evanston campus)
- Rashmi Raj: Administrative Coordinator
- Jill Wenderott: Treasurer
- Olivia Chesniak: Web Design Coordinator
- Sri Bala Gorugantu: Web Design Coordinator
- Aparajitha Vaidyanathan: Social Media Coordinator

Structural Changes to NUPA

In October 2020, NUPA held the first formal elections for the NUPA Executive Committee in over 3 years. In these competitive elections, a full Executive Committee representing both the Chicago and Evanston campuses of Northwestern was formally seated. With the reinstatement of a formal Executive Committee, NUPA was able to make amendments to the bylaws such that the structure of NUPA matched the method in which the association was operating. Further, this allowed the transfer of NUPA financial accounts, the formalization of permanent sub-committees, and the platform from which to work with university administration and other academic institutions’ postdoctoral association leadership teams to advocate, collaborate, and share ideas.

Organization-wide Meetings

NUPA leadership hosts bi-weekly meetings over Zoom that are open to the entire postdoctoral community at Northwestern University. At these meetings, general NUPA updates are given, including programming updates, financial accounts status, and university and OPA announcements. These meetings provide a space for the broader postdoctoral community at Northwestern to engage with NUPA leadership, raise issues to NUPA’s attention, and get involved with NUPA. The bulk of the business of NUPA takes place during these regular open sessions.

Bylaws Amendments

The Bylaws were amended in February 2021. Amendments included the addition of the Vision for NUPA: “The vision of NUPA is to create an inclusive community by and for postdocs at Northwestern University.” Definitions were added to bylaws to delineate Active and Affiliate Members of NUPA,
making the distinction such that only active postdoctoral trainees at Northwestern as defined by the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs (OPA) may vote and reap any financial benefits, such as monetary prizes, from NUPA, while Affiliate Members, e.g., alumni, visiting scholars, postdoctoral trainees from NU affiliate laboratories, and faculty advisors, may attend community events and programming and engage with NUPA in a limited capacity. The Bylaws were also amended to include details for the Executive Committee elections, terms, voting structure, eligibility, removal, vacancies, and leaves of absence, as well as updates to elections management and the bylaws amendments process. Roles and responsibilities for each Executive Committee position were added, and the sub-committee structure was modified to include formation, termination, financial, and oversight policies for sub-committees and to formalize two standing sub-committees: the Professional Development Sub-committee and the Social Sub-committee.

**NUPA Sub-committees**

Since the formalization of the Professional Development and Social Sub-committees, NUPA has seen an increase in engagement with NUPA programming. The Social Sub-committee currently has 6 members, and the Professional Development Sub-committee has 7 members. Because of the increased involvement in NUPA sub-committees, there has been an increase in programming available to NU postdoctoral trainees, as detailed in the following sections.

NUPA is also in the process of proposing and formalizing a third permanent sub-committee: the NUPA Advocacy Sub-committee. The mission of the NUPA Advocacy subcommittee will be to advocate on behalf of Northwestern University postdoctoral associates to TGS, Northwestern University, and at a national level. The NUPA Advocacy subcommittee will provide an opportunity for postdocs to bring up issues affecting them, communicate postdoc issues to the NUPA Executive Committee (who will then communicate to OPA and TGS), and provide lists of names for representative postdocs to appoint to relevant NU committees. The vision for the NUPA Advocacy Committee is to have a broad scope, encompassing wellness and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives for postdocs, as well as informing postdocs about science policy changes that they should know about. The NUPA Advocacy committee will be added to the next draft of the NUPA bylaws for review by the postdoc community and voted on by the incoming Executive Committee.

**NUPA Representation on University Committees**

Over the past year, NUPA has gained representation on three separate University level committees to advocate for the needs and opinions of the postdoctoral community at Northwestern. NUPA has had two members (Kay-Marie Lamar and Zois Syrgiannis, followed by Rashmi Raj) represent postdoctoral affairs on the GLAC-led Northwestern University COVID committee board to communicate concerns regarding COVID-safety of students and postdocs to university administration and advocate on their behalf. The committee has successfully advocated for making N95 masks readily available to the NU community, improved COVID safety protocols, testing, and transportation. The committee also assisted the University with vaccine distribution efforts. NUPA is also represented on the newly formed Community Safety Advisory Board (CSAB) by Rashmi Raj. The board was formed to strengthen relationships with the campus community and public safety efforts on campus as well as to foster greater transparency and trust. The CSAB will make proposals to leadership on ways to improve the safety and well-being of all students, faculty, staff, and visitors at Northwestern, especially among our Black, indigenous, and people of color community members. Finally, NUPA recently recruited two
members (Kay-Marie Lamar and Katie Pierson) to represent postdoctoral associates on the Women’s Center Advisory Board.

Inter-institutional Postdoctoral Association Collaborations
In addition to representation on Northwestern University committees, NUPA leaders also began collaborating and working with postdoctoral association (PDA) leadership from other academic institutions. Specifically, PDA leadership from Chicago area institutions, including University of Illinois Chicago, University of Chicago, Rush University Medical Center, Argonne National Laboratories, and Loyola University have informally collaborated on professional development programming, such as Big Data Nights, as well as on social programming prior to COVID-19 programming restrictions. Recently, Big Ten institution PDA leadership have begun collaborating and regularly meeting to support postdoctoral trainees across the Big Ten. These meetings have focused on how to support and build up smaller PDAs within the collaboration, as well as on collaborative programming across institutions. NUPA regularly shares our professional development and social programming opportunities with both of these collaborations. Finally, NUPA recently joined a communication platform connecting PDA leadership from academic institutions across North America. This platform will allow for new idea generation from institutions with which NUPA has not previously had the opportunity to interact, as well as additional opportunities for collaborative programming.

Financial Updates
The Chicago Organizations Financial Office (COFO) account for NUPA was re-established during the 2020-21 academic year, allowing the Executive Committee to review our account balance and budget for events throughout the year. NUPA thanks the NU OPA for financial sponsorship of many of our events this year. Moving forward into the 2021-22 academic year, NUPA will submit a yearly budget to OPA to request funding for the year, and expenditures will be made from the COFO account.

Programming for Northwestern Postdoctoral Trainees
Professional Development Programming
Summer 2020 Professional Development Series
In lieu of the annual NUPA Symposium (canceled due to COVID-19 restrictions on gathering), NUPA held its first online Professional Development Series in July through September of 2020. This series included seminars, workshops, and career panels covering a wide range of topics and careers of interest to postdoctoral trainees at Northwestern. Each session was planned and facilitated by a different volunteer from the NUPA community. The full schedule of events is included below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Session/Speaker</th>
<th>Attendance</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>July 9, 2020</td>
<td>Whole Brain Communication&lt;br&gt;Steven L. Franconeri, PhD</td>
<td>39</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 16, 2020</td>
<td>Careers in Academia Panel&lt;br&gt;Dr. Ameet Morjaria, Dr. Manasa Kandula, Dr. Jonathan Emery</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 23, 2020</td>
<td>Communication in Multicultural Teams&lt;br&gt;Nicole Barile</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 30, 2020</td>
<td>Careers in the Private Sector Panel&lt;br&gt;Kavita Chandra, PhD, Mohan Liu, PhD, Emma Goldsmith, PhD</td>
<td>59</td>
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Winter 2021 Professional Development Series
The NUPA Winter Professional Development series took place from February through April 2021. All sessions were virtual, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Although virtual sessions take away some of the charm of being able to meet people in person, being virtual did give us a chance to invite a wide variety of distinguished speakers, who otherwise may not have been able to travel to Chicago to speak. The series was a mix of workshops, seminars, and informal “Coffee chats,” with recent Northwestern postdoc alumni. While the beginning of series had good momentum and high levels of attendance, the latter half suffered from “Zoom fatigue,” after over a year of pandemic programming. Comments received through the post-session surveys indicated that people did not like breakout rooms and that they should be notified of breakout rooms in advance. The finale event of the series was an Elevator Pitch Competition, during which participants were judged on 2-minute research pitches, with the top three finalists received prizes. Eleven postdoctoral trainees participated in the competition, and the feedback from the competition was largely positive, indicating excitement for events where postdocs can share their research as well as learn about the research of other postdocs at Northwestern and neighboring institutions.

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Session/Presenter/Title</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feb. 25, 2021</td>
<td>Strategic Career Planning: Successfully Transitioning Careers Vicky Sherwood</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 4, 2021</td>
<td>Coffee Chats: Mark Kittisopikul</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 18, 2021</td>
<td>Networking 101: Making Connections in Industry &amp; Academia Helen Oloroso</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 25, 2021</td>
<td>Coffee Chats: Dean Proctor, Broad Institute</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 1, 2021</td>
<td>Building Resilience Amidst Uncertainty Workshop Bennet Goldberg and Jessica Paige</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 7, 2021</td>
<td>Science &amp; Government: How to Make a Difference Through Advocacy Yvette Seger and Tobin Smith</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 15, 2021</td>
<td>Communicating Your Research to a Lay Audience Byron Stewart</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 22, 2021</td>
<td>Coffee Chats</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Social and Community Building Programming

Monthly Virtual Social Nights
Due to COVID-19 restrictions on gathering, NUPA moved away from past in-person social programming practices and to a completely online engagement format. This transition posed multiple challenges as well as opportunities. While social gatherings over Zoom can become tedious, this platform drove the NUPA social committee to try various themes and activities to bring postdocs across the university together. Furthermore, the online platform has allowed for increased engagement and community across both Northwestern campuses, whereas previously there was a necessary divide in social programming for each campus.

NUPA began hosting monthly online virtual social nights/happy hours on Friday evenings. Attendance at these monthly happy hours ranges from 10-20 postdocs, and the events last for about 1.5-2 hours. Themes/activities for the social nights have included game nights, trivia nights, craft nights, and cocktail nights.

Book Club
Over the course of the year, NUPA also began hosting a monthly virtual book club. Book club reads are nominated by book club members and final selections are made through voting. A wide range of books have been read/discussed by the NUPA book club, including historical fiction, literary fiction, poetic fiction, science fiction, short stories, historical non-fiction, and social commentary non-fiction. A full list of past and upcoming book club reads can be found on the NUPA website. The NUPA Book Club has 17 members with about 6 to 10 members attending each book club discussion session each month.

Wellness and Wellbeing Programming

Week of Wellness
NUPA received a $500 YourLife (YL) Wellness Grant from Northwestern to host a virtual Week of Wellness (WoW) from February 1-5, 2021. Postdocs associated with NUPA were polled via the NUPA Slack channel to determine which events would be of most interest and, coupled with the idea to promote wellness across various dimensions and cross-promote YL Wellness events, a diverse set of wellness events was scheduled for the WoW. One event has held per day, and NUPA-specific and YL Wellness events were alternated throughout the week. The schedule for the WoW was as follows: Monday – Zentangle workshop with Starla Snead (NUPA); Tuesday – Drop-in Meditation with Elizabeth Tuckwell (YL Wellness); Wednesday – Heart Healthy Nutrition Seminar with Vicki Shanta Retelny (NUPA); Thursday – Total Body HIIT with Ceina (YL Wellness); Friday – (C/M)ocktail Making & Happy Hour (NUPA). For each event attended, participants were entered into a raffle to win 1 of 5 $20 DoorDash gift cards. For the WoW, 93 participants registered, and 52 participants attended events. Based on post-event survey results, we are confident that our WoW improved postdoc wellness in various dimensions. In particular, the Zentangle event (with capped participation at 20) was sold out within the first week of advertisement, and it was our most well-attended event, with the percent attendance over 80%. The
event scored 4.7/5 on meeting attendee expectations, 4.7/5 on supporting attendee wellness, and 4.9/5 on how engaging the session was. Attendees mentioned that they liked "low pressure easy access event", and that the session was "great chance to try something new" and "good break to focus on wellness".

**Wellness event promotion**

During the WoW in February 2021, postings about the events and wellness in general were made daily on the #wellness Slack channel (note: the #wellness channel later became merged with the #social_events channel). To continue promoting wellness to postdocs, weekly posts have been made on the Slack channel for events either hosted by NUPA or Northwestern.

**Engagement with the Northwestern Postdoctoral Community**

NUPA launched a new website (https://sites.northwestern.edu/nupa/), in March 2021. The new website hosts information related to professional development and social activities (e.g., book club). In addition, the website enables postdocs to connect with NUPA on Slack, subscribe to our mailing list, and/or volunteer with on a sub-committee. The website also provides resources to newly appointed postdocs, postdoc parents, and caregivers, as well as links to the wellness programs.

NUPA maintains a practice of sending monthly newsletters, which are sent out on the first Monday of every month. These monthly newsletters advertise monthly social activities, professional development seminars, workshops, or other events. For example, the newsletter recently featured the winners of Pitch Slam, the elevator pitch competition held during the 2021 Winter Professional Development Series. In addition, the newsletter provides updates from the COVID Committee and the Community safety advisory board. Currently the NUPA mailing list has 825 subscribers with an overall engagement rate of 37%.

![Overall engagement levels with the NUPA Newsletter from May 2020 through April 2021.](image)

In addition to maintaining consistent communication with NUPA members through the monthly newsletter, NUPA also recently launched a community-wide Slack channel for informal communications between NUPA leadership and NUPA members, as well as to foster community among members. Over the past year, the Slack channel subscribers increased 46% to 272 NUPA members and maintains an engagement rate of 22%.
NUPA currently maintains social media accounts on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn, with 716 followers on Twitter, 525 follows on Facebook, 166 followers on Instagram, and 58 group members on LinkedIn. The posts on all social media accounts in the 2020-2021 calendar year included advertisement for social and professional development events, and photos of events (primarily screenshots of Zoom meetings in the year of COVID). Average engagement on posts was between 5-10 likes/retweets across all platforms. Social media posts showing event advertisement from other institutes such as Women in Science and UChicago were also shared on NUPA accounts in the form of stories on Instagram and Facebook or retweets on Twitter.

Future Goals for NUPA

NUPA has several goals set for the 2021-2022 academic year. As discussed above, we plan to launch the Advocacy Sub-committee to advocate on behalf of Northwestern University postdoctoral associates to TGS, Northwestern University, and at a national level. We plan to further amend the Bylaws of NUPA to reflect the logistical operations of NUPA more accurately and set a baseline threshold for budget deadlines, meeting minute public availability, and association transparency. With the relaxing of university-wide restrictions on gathering, NUPA looks forward to gathering in person for both social and professional development events. We plan to re-introduce the NUPA summer sports gatherings, as well as outdoor weekly lunch meetings. We plan to host a Summer Picnic for postdocs and families to kick-off in-person programming, followed by additional monthly pub nights and quarterly larger-scale social events for NUPA members. Finally, the Professional Development sub-committee of NUPA aims to strengthen ties with other postdoc communities using two approaches. First, to increase cross-institutional collaboration and network building, NUPA is coordinating with other institutional members of the Chicago Area Postdoctoral Association to plan a workshop focusing on effective self-negotiation followed by a networking hour. Secondly, as part of the B1G+ PDA, NUPA is organizing a virtual seminar series to pool shared resources and boost attendance across all participating institutions. We will also be holding regular monthly professional development workshops and seminars for NUPA members and increasing awareness of existing internal Northwestern resources and external resources available to all Northwestern postdoctoral trainees to help them prepare for their future careers.
The 2021-2022 NUPA Executive Committee is excited to continue working to serve the needs of postdoctoral trainees at Northwestern, both in the continuing the efforts and ideas of the 2020-2021 Executive Committee and also in incorporating new ideas to further engage and support Northwestern University postdocs.

NUPA Executive Committee 2021-2022 academic year:

- Kay-Marie Lamar: Co-Chair (Chicago campus)
- Cat Majors: Co-Chair (Evanston campus)
- Saikat Banerjee: Administrative Coordinator
- Sai Phani Kumar Vangala: Treasurer
- Sri Bala Gorugantu: Web Design Coordinator
- Aparajitha Vaidyanathan: Social Media Coordinator
- Rashmi Raj: Professional Development Sub-Committee Chair
- Shravas Rao: Social Sub-Committee Chair