Background: The University of Pittsburgh is a world-class educational and research institution that provides its faculty and trainees with state-of-the-art facilities, adequate funding and a firm institutional commitment to excellence in the classroom, laboratory, and clinical practice. The single greatest determinant of an institution’s success, however, is its people. The Office of Academic Career Development (OACD) was created to address the specific career development needs of students, fellows, residents and faculty. The OACD offers training in practical, content-based skills (e.g., grant writing, preparing a curriculum vitae, writing a research manuscript, etc.) that our constituents can use to develop their academic careers. The OACD also offers training in professional skills (e.g., time management, conflict resolution, effective negotiation, etc.) that our constituents can use to achieve a more productive and satisfying academic career. The OACD is also an advocate and trainer for effective mentoring programs throughout the Schools of the Health Sciences. The OACD believes that a supportive and collaborative environment and purposeful mentorship are integral components in attracting, developing and retaining the biomedical scientists and clinicians best suited to continuing the long tradition of excellence in the health sciences at the University of Pittsburgh.

Objective: By providing full-spectrum career guidance, professional skills training, mentoring advocacy and support for new and existing initiatives, the OACD will empower the entire academic health science community at every level of experience.

Method: The OACD developed two initial workshop series. The 2002-2003 Postdoctoral Professionalism Series was designed to provide postdoctoral scholars with academic career development skills that would complement research training provided by their mentors. This series offered workshops that taught both practical and professional skills. The workshops in this initial series were: Building Your Academic Portfolio: CVs, Biosketches, and Résumés; Getting to the Payline: Successful Fellowship Applications; and Enhancing Your Professional Skills: Strategies for Conflict Management. The OACD also developed the 2003 Academic Medicine Series for clinical faculty, focusing on professional skills. The workshops in this initial series were: Strategies for Conflict Management; Time Management and Productivity; and Negotiation and Influence. These workshops were taught by University of Pittsburgh content experts, by visiting scholars from other higher education institutions, and by professional consultants.

Discussion: Post-workshop evaluations have shown that these workshops are definitely meeting the needs of our postdoctoral scholars and faculty. The OACD has received overwhelmingly positive feedback on these workshops. The postdocs are grateful that the institution has given attention and committed resources to their professional development. The faculty has asked the OACD to bring instructors back to teach these workshops again for their colleagues. The OACD is empowering its constituents by demonstrating that the institution values them and their professional contributions.