GRADUATE JOURNAL

The long and the short of it

My thesis work at Rockefeller University, New York, is aimed at finding out how HIV carries its genetic information into the cells it infects. This requires me to set long- and short-term scientific goals. But to pursue those goals, I may have to make similar-style career decisions.

In the short term, I would like to uncover the identity and activity of the cellular proteins involved in HIV nuclear import. In the long term, I want to discover small molecules that can block this step in the viral replication cycle and so might be used as drugs to combat HIV.

It is no coincidence that my short-term goals are more in line with traditional academics and my long-term goals are more applied. I strongly believe in the power and potential of 'translational research' to bridge the gap between basic science and new medical treatments.

Whether or not I stay in academia, I'll be looking for a place that supports this type of disease-oriented research and that welcomes young investigators who like to explore new ideas. The importance of this kind of research has never been more apparent to me than during my time at Rockefeller, where the school insignia reads: "Science for the benefit of humankind". That is what I hope to do throughout my career. ■

Tshaka Cunningham is a fifth-year graduate student at Rockefeller University in New York.

SCIENTISTS & SOCIETIES

Junior Faculty at the Karolinska Institute

One of the toughest transitions that a scientist makes is from being a postdoc to becoming a junior faculty member. To ease this transition, the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, Sweden, last year launched Junior Faculty, a programme targeted at junior researchers with a PhD. The aim is to provide the tools that will allow these scientists to succeed in their careers. To meet this goal, the programme offers mentoring, career counselling, courses and networking opportunities.

One of the big challenges is reaching the programme's target group — the Karolinska Institute's 28 departments are quite widely spread out, both physically and thematically. In addition, researchers in the target group are often reasonably 'invisible' as they have no formal positions and so aren't always on the personnel registers.

The solution to this was to create an information network with an 'ambassador' at each department. The ambassadors will identify the target group within their department, spread information about Junior Faculty activities and meet with the other ambassadors to plan events and raise issues.

At the Center for Surgical Sciences, for example, ambassador Olav Rooyackers is arranging a series of workshops on funding issues. Another ambassador, Zarina Kabir at the Neurotec Department, has brought junior researchers together to talk about career paths. So far these discussions have resulted in an initiative to create a structured career plan for the younger scientists in the department.

The Junior Faculty programme has also contributed to the restart of a passive network at the Karolinska Institute, WISE — Women In Science. More than 40 women took part in the first meeting and the activities within the network will include scientific meetings, seminars and lobbying.

Networks can provide a forum for the discussion of common interests and provide support to researchers for their everyday work. They also act as a forum for the exchange of ideas. Regular dialogue between researchers from different parts of the university can form the basis for constructive new thinking and favourable personal development. It could even result in you meeting your next collaborator or someone to publish with. ■

www.ki.se/juniorfaculty

Johanna Nilsson is coordinator for the Junior Faculty programme.

MOVERS

Markus Wenk, assistant professor, Depts of Biochemistry and Biological Sciences, National University of Singapore; Sonia Davila, postdoctoral fellow, Genome Institute of Singapore

R. LOON

Advancing in your scientific career is difficult enough, but securing a tenure-track position at the same time as your partner who is also a scientist is quite another. Markus Wenk and Sonia Davila took a drastic approach to solving this problem — they moved halfway around the world from the United States to Singapore this year.

In 2002, Wenk realized that he needed to establish himself as an independent researcher — impossible as a non-tenure-track researcher at Yale University. "My driver was to become independent and to steer my work on lipid function towards a 'systems-biology' approach," he says.

CV

Markus Wenk **2001–2004:** Associate research scientist, Yale University School of Medicine
1997–2001: Postdoctoral associate, cell-biology department at Yale University School of Medicine
1997: PhD biophysics, University of Basel, Switzerland

Sonia Davila **2001–2004:** Postdoctoral associate, Yale University School of Medicine; PhD in genetics, University of Santiago de Compostela, Spain

So he looked to Asia, because he was aware that opportunities there tended to include a high-tech component — something he was interested in exploring in his research focus of membrane-lipid biology. He soon found an opportunity in Singapore, where the government has created a huge 'Biopolis' to house an expanded national research effort (see *Nature* **425,** 746–747; 2003).

When Wenk received an offer from the National University of Singapore (NUS), things got complicated. First, he got a counter-offer, including tenure-track status, from Yale. Second, his partner Davila, who Wenk had met at Yale, needed to find a job as well. He turned down Yale's offer and Davila secured a position at the Genome Institute of Singapore. Both admit that their sense of adventure played a part in their decision to move.

Wenk and Davila say that they have noticed a different culture within their new research groups compared with the ones they left behind in the United States, where labs tend to be shrouded in secrecy and characterized by competition. "The lab concept here is not as closed as in the States," says Davila.

And neither feels isolated from the West. Wenk plans to keep an adjunct appointment with Yale and is also evaluating the possibility of creating a Master's programme in tropical-disease research at the University of Basel in Switzerland, the NUS and the Novartis Institute of Tropical Diseases in Singapore.

One other thing that Wenk and Davila are happy with is Singapore's climate — especially Davila, who finds the tropical temperatures more akin to her native Spain. ■