

4.3.12 Postdoctoral Research Fellows

Chapter 4 - General Personnel	Original Effective Date: September 2019
Section: 4.3 Recruitment, Selection and Appointment	Date Last Reviewed: May 2022
Responsible Entity: Office of Postdoctoral Affairs; Vice President for Research; Vice President/Chief Human Resources Officer	Date Last Revised: May 2022

I. Purpose

To establish the obligations and expectations of all parties involved in Postdoctoral Research Fellow training.

II. Scope

This policy applies to all Postdoctoral Research Fellows, academic departments, institutes, centers, or research training programs in which a postdoctoral research training position resides and faculty mentors.

III. Policy

Postdoctoral Research Fellows are appointed to an academic research training position to pursue advanced research training under the mentorship of a faculty member to enhance professional skills in preparation for an independent career. Such appointments are temporary with a total duration of postdoctoral research training of not more than 5 years.

It is the policy of UT Health San Antonio that Postdoctoral Research Fellows are academic trainees and will follow the parameters of Administrative and Professional (A&P) employees for purposes of defining the employer-employee relationship.

A. Appointment Title

Postdoctoral research trainees shall be appointed to the **title, Postdoctoral Research Fellow**, using the appropriate **Human Resource (HR) Code 0451**. The use of this appointment title should be coordinated through the respective Dean's Office, the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs, and the Office of Human Resources. This title does not appear in the Classified Employee Pay and Job Description Plan of UT Health San Antonio and is considered a non-classified A&P position.

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B. Postdoctoral Research Fellows

1. A Postdoctoral Research Fellow (“postdoc”) is a trainee pursuing mentored research training beyond the doctoral level in preparation for an independent career. In all cases, appointment as a Postdoctoral Research Fellow is for a limited period of time and for the purpose of trainee participation in advanced research studies under the mentorship of a faculty member and towards individualized career development goals including enhanced professional skills and career independence
2. The following applies to all Postdoctoral Research Fellows regardless of their source of funding:
 - a. the appointee has been awarded a doctoral degree (e.g., PhD, MD, DDS, DVM, DO, or equivalent) in an appropriate field; and
 - b. the appointment involves full-time training in research and scholarly activities, and does not include divided (non-trainee) responsibilities or duties; and
 - c. the appointment is temporary, usually for a period of one year with the possibility of annual re-appointment for up to a total of five (5) years of aggregate postdoctoral research training at any institution (not including approved leave); and
 - d. the appointment is viewed as preparatory for transition to career independence through the development of professional skills and includes all relevant activities related to this preparation; these are typically the preparation of manuscripts describing research findings, presentations at professional meetings, participation (including presentations) at local seminars, attendance at career-related training activities, manuscript review, and grant preparation; activities should enhance performance in the research-related projects which provide trainee support; training may involve the joint preparation and development of proposals for extramural funding; training must contain instruction in the responsible conduct of research including rigor and reproducibility; and
 - e. the appointee is supervised by a faculty research mentor who will provide the opportunity for research training as well as professional career development; and
 - f. the appointee may be part of a clinical training program if research training under the supervision of a faculty research mentor is a primary purpose of the appointment; and
 - g. the appointee, in consultation with his or her mentor, is expected to publish the results of the research completed during the period of the appointment or in a timely manner.

C. Terms of Appointment

1. A Postdoctoral Research Fellow position is a full-time (1.0 FTE) research training position. Reduction in effort is permitted in limited and temporary circumstances.
2. A Postdoctoral Research Fellow is usually appointed for a period of one (1) year with the possibility of annual re-appointment for up to a maximum of six (6) years* of aggregate postdoctoral research training. The maximum refers to time spent in research training after receipt of the doctoral degree and includes postdoctoral research training at other institutions. However, time after the doctorate spent away from research training will not be included in the total (e.g., for parental leave, military service, etc.). If research training is conducted on a part time basis, effort will aggregate at that rate.

**Effective March 31, 2022, due to COVID pandemic, the Vice President for Research (VPR) has temporarily modified the Term of Appointment, extending maximum duration of training from five (5) to six (6) years in aggregate. All other aspects of this policy, i.e., time spent away from research training remain in effect.*

3. Details of the duration and condition of appointment are described in an offer letter at the time of appointment. Appointments are subject to annual renewal based on satisfactory progress and productivity.
4. An Office of Postdoctoral Affairs Advisory Committee established by the VPR will review and make decisions on all requests to reduce effort below full-time or to extend the maximal allowable training period of postdoctoral research fellows. Requests for these exceptions must be submitted as a document which provides justification of the request and is signed by the research mentor and chair of the academic department or director of the institute, center, or research training program; requests will be considered on a case-by-case basis.
5. If a Postdoctoral Research Fellow remains at UT Health San Antonio beyond the allowable aggregate training period (six years*), the individual must either:
 - a. be approved for extended postdoctoral research training; or
 - b. transition to a staff research position, with review and approval by the Office of Human Resources; or
 - c. apply and participate in a competitive recruitment process for a staff or faculty position; or
 - d. be terminated with a minimum thirty (30) calendar day written notice in advance of the five-year minimum.

Transition to a staff research position is only relevant when the department chair (or institute or center director) and the postdoctoral research fellow's faculty mentor assure that the individual has the requisite research expertise and skills to contribute to the continuity of on-going research with the faculty mentor.

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For transition to a faculty position, the guidelines in the Handbook of Operating Policies (HOP) [3.6.7](#) *Guidelines for Academic Trainees Becoming Faculty Members*, should be followed.

D. Salary

1. Postdoctoral Research Fellows receive a salary as described in a required offer letter at the time of appointment.
2. The minimum pay level for a Postdoctoral Research Fellow is the minimal level stipend amount published by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in the guidelines for the Ruth L. Kirschstein National Research Service Award (NRSA). A Postdoctoral Research Fellow may be paid more, but not less, than the minimum amount. Future adjustments to achieve the NIH minimal level will be implemented within 180 days after the publication or implementation of revised NIH guidelines (whichever is later).
3. For Postdoctoral Research Fellows that receive salary or stipend from an individual training/fellowship award or receive support from an outside entity such as a foreign government or organization, the minimal pay level must be maintained and provided by institutional funds.
4. For Postdoctoral Research Fellows that receive salary from NIH training or fellowship awards, fringe benefits (except for allowed health insurance coverage) must be provided by allowable institutional funds.
5. Year-to-year increases in salary are based on satisfactory progress in research training as determined by the primary research mentor. The mentor and Postdoctoral Research Fellow should meet several times throughout the year to discuss progress and to redirect training efforts where deficiencies exist.
6. Postdoctoral Research Fellows paid from any source considered exempt and not subject to overtime for any hours in excess of 40 hours per week.

E. Documentation

1. A doctoral degree is required from an accredited institution in the United States or from a foreign institution that provides a U.S. equivalent degree and training. If the degree was completed in a foreign country, regardless of whether it is in English, it must be translated and verified by a foreign credential evaluation organization who is a member of the National Association of Credential Evaluation Services (naces.org). If the trainee has more than one doctoral degree (e.g., MD and PhD), transcript(s) pertinent to research training must be provided; copies of both are preferred.
2. For individuals who have completed all academic requirements for a doctoral degree and are awaiting award of degree, it may be permissible to be appointed as a

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Postdoctoral Research Fellow. In this case and prior to appointment, an official letter prepared on institutional letterhead by an official (provost, dean, or equivalent) of the doctoral institution and an original copy of the trainee's educational transcript(s) must be submitted to the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs. *The institutional letter must indicate that the trainee has successfully completed all requirements for the doctoral degree together with the planned date of degree conferral.* As necessary, an approved foreign credential evaluation must be submitted with the original. Once the degree has been awarded, an original transcript (indicating degree conferral) as well as a copy of the diploma must be submitted to the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs.

3. For trainees who are not U.S. permanent residents or U.S. citizens and who are from countries where English is not the native language, proof of English language proficiency must be provided to the Office of International Services (OIS). An OIS Advisory Committee will review and make decisions for exceptions to any documentation requirement. An individual can meet this requirement by providing one of the following:
 - a. Evidence of earning a minimum score of 80 iBT (internet-based test) or 550 PBT (paper-based test) on Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), or overall band/score of 6.5 on Academic Examination of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) within the past two years.
 - b. Evidence of passing board or licensure examinations in English.
 - c. Evidence of higher education degree or high school diploma from an academic institution where the curriculum is taught exclusively in English.
 - d. Signed attestation of English language proficiency by faculty mentor.

F. Recruitment and Appointment

1. All recruitment activities for a Postdoctoral Research Fellow are the responsibility of the academic department, institute, center, or research training program in which the postdoctoral research training position resides. The academic department, institute, center, or research training program is not required to submit a job requisition to the Office of Human Resources nor post the position for recruitment. Extramural advertisements for recruitment to a postdoctoral research training position must be approved by the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs prior to use.
2. Any questions related to the immigration status of an international postdoctoral research fellow should be directed to the Office of International Services (OIS).
3. The academic department, institute, center, or research-training program is responsible for obtaining/verifying the academic credentials of the candidate and the completion of a criminal background check and sanctions credentialing, and if necessary, processing records through the OIS.

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- a. Prior to appointment, the OIS must receive:
 - i. An original, official transcript of the candidate's doctoral coursework and degree conferral (with translation if necessary).
 - ii. A copy of the candidate's doctoral diploma.
 - iii. A copy of the candidate's offer letter from UT Health San Antonio (signed by the candidate, faculty mentor, department chair, and the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs, as necessary).
 - b. For an international candidate, the academic department, institute, center, or research training program is responsible for contacting the OIS and ensuring compliance with all federal and institutional requirements for appointment, and that the appropriate visa is on file.
4. The academic department, institute, center, or research training program will notify the Office of Human Resources of the selected Postdoctoral Research Fellow by submission of the [Notification of Intent to Hire](#) form with plans of a transition date at the start of a payroll month to enable timely processing of the appointment.

G. Criminal Background and Sanction Checks

1. UT Health San Antonio conducts a criminal background check on Postdoctoral Research Fellows as outlined in [HOP 4.4.1 Criminal Background Checks](#).
2. UT Health San Antonio does not knowingly appoint an individual that is listed by a federal agency as excluded, suspended, or otherwise ineligible for participation in federal programs to hold any position for which the individual's compensation are paid in whole or in part, directly or indirectly, by a federal health care program or otherwise with federal funds. Monthly inquiries are conducted on all employees/trainees. Additional details are provided in [HOP 4.4.2 Sanction Checks](#).

H. Required Training

Each Postdoctoral Research Trainee is required to attend mandatory training based on their responsibilities; training must be completed within a specified timeframe. Failure to meet training requirements will result in disciplinary action. Details regarding required training and consequences for failure to meet training requirements are provided in [HOP 4.10.4 Required Training and Disciplinary Actions For Failure to Attend Compliance Training Sessions](#).

I. General Provisions

The following provisions apply to all Postdoctoral Research Fellows:

1. New Postdoc Orientation (NPO)

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Postdoctoral Research Fellows must attend NPO within three (3) months of start date; this program is provided by the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs. The Director of the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs must approved exceptions to this requirement.

2. Health Insurance

Postdoctoral Research Fellows must obtain health insurance coverage throughout appointment/training.

3. Annual Evaluation

Postdoctoral Research Fellows are evaluated on an annual basis via a standardized performance evaluation process. The faculty mentor must complete this assessment and must include the opportunity for the Postdoctoral Research Fellow to respond in writing. It is expected that both will regularly discuss successes and shortcomings in order to modify training and goals between annual evaluation dates. The record of annual evaluation must be provided to the academic department, institute, center or research training program that is responsible for the postdoctoral research position; these records will be available to the Postdoctoral Research Fellow upon request.

4. Individualized career Development Plan (IDP)

Postdoctoral Research Fellows must establish an IDP withing three (3) months after initial appointment and submit a copy to the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs. Thereafter, an annually updated IDP must be submitted to the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs at least one (1) month prior to the annualized appointment date.

5. Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) and Rigor & Reproducibility (R&R)

Postdoctoral Research Fellows must participate in ongoing training in RCR and participate in a course or workshop on R&R at least once every four (4) years.

6. Termination Based on Funding Limitations

Postdoctoral Research Fellows may be terminated with at least thirty (30) calendar days' notice if funding supporting the appointment is ending.

7. Termination for Cause

Postdoctoral Research Fellows may be terminated for cause related to work performance, work behavior, or violation of institutional policies (see [HOP 4.9.3](#) *Progressive Disciplinary Action*).

8. Grievance Policy

Postdoctoral Research Fellows shall have access to a grievance policy (see [HOP 4.9.5](#) *Grievance Policy and Procedures*).

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J. Conflict of Interest and Conflict of Commitment

All Postdoctoral Research Fellows must disclose any interactions with external entities that may be related to their position. This annual disclosure is completed online via the UT Health San Antonio's Conflict of Interest (COI) and Conflict of Commitment (COC) Assessment [reporting system](#).

K. Scientific Integrity

1. Postdoctoral Research Fellows must adhere to all UT Health San Antonio and University of Texas System rules, regulations, and policies related to the responsible conduct of research. High ethical standards in the conduct of research are expected, e.g., maintenance of permanent auditable records of all experimental protocols, data, and findings.
2. Scientific misconduct includes the fabrication, falsification, plagiarism, or other practices that materially deviate from those that are commonly accepted within the scientific community for proposing, conducting, or reporting research. It does not include honest error or differences in interpretation or judgment of data.
3. Misconduct also includes retaliation of any kind against a person who reported or provided information about suspected or alleged misconduct. All scientific misconduct must be reported to the Vice President for Research who will take the necessary precautions to protect the confidentiality of all persons involved in such allegations and assure a fair hearing under the principles of due process.

L. Performance, Discipline and Dismissal

1. Postdoctoral Research Fellows may have their appointment terminated immediately if they have violated expectations set forth below. The basis for termination must be documented and provided in written form to the Postdoctoral Research Fellow with a copy provided to the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs.
2. Performance expectations for Postdoctoral Research Fellows include, but are not limited to:
 - a. conscientious discharge of assigned duties; and
 - b. adherence to ethical standards and the responsible conduct of research; and
 - c. compliance with good laboratory practices and recognized university standards; and
 - d. observation of established university guidelines for research involving biohazards, human subjects, or animals.

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M. Vacation, Personal Days, Sick Leave, Holidays, Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) and Emergency Leave

1. A Postdoctoral Research Fellow who is appointed for at least twenty (20) hours per week for a period of at least four and one-half (4½) months is eligible for the comprehensive leave and extended illness bank leave per [HOP 4.7.24 Comprehensive Leave Program](#).
2. They are also eligible for holidays per [HOP 4.7.10 Holidays](#), are protected by the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) per [HOP 4.7.13 Family Medical Leave Act \(FMLA\)](#); and will be granted emergency leave per [HOP 4.7.22 Emergency Leave](#).

IV. Definitions

There are no defined terms used in this Policy.

V. Related References

Questions regarding this policy should be direct to the [Office of Postdoctoral Affairs](#).

Additional Resources:

[Office of International Services](#)

VI. Review and Approval History

- A. The approving authority of this policy is the University Executive Committee.
- B. The review frequency cycle is set for three years following the last review date, a time period that is not mandated by regulatory, accreditation, or other authority.

Effective Date	Action Taken	Approved By	Date Approved
09/2019	Policy Origination		
05/2020	Policy Revision		
03/2022	Policy Revision, discretionary edits		
05/2022	Policy Revision	Executive Committee	5/16/2022