

Postdoctoral Researcher Policy Manual

A manual of terms and conditions relating to the appointment of postdoctoral researchers.

Preamble

A Postdoctoral Researcher is an individual who has received a doctoral degree (or equivalent) and is engaged in a temporary and defined period of mentored advanced training to enhance the professional and research independence needed to pursue his or her chosen career path. At the University of Chicago, the postdoctoral experience emphasizes scholarship and continued research training. The Postdoctoral Researcher conducts research under the general oversight of a faculty or other mentor in preparation for a career in academe, industry, government, or the nonprofit sector. In many disciplines postdoctoral work provides essential training for individuals pursuing academic careers and may include opportunities to enhance teaching and other professional skills.

Postdoctoral Researchers contribute to the academic community by enhancing the research and education programs of the University. The University strives to provide a stimulating, positive, and constructive experience for the Postdoctoral Researcher by emphasizing the mutual commitment and responsibility of the institution, the faculty and other researchers, and the Postdoctoral Researcher.

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This policy defines and sets forth terms and conditions relating to the appointment of Postdoctoral Researchers. It applies to both:

1. Postdoctoral Scholars (PDS), who are employees of the University and
2. Postdoctoral Fellows (PDF), who are paid stipends by extramural agencies either directly or through the University.

Postdoctoral Fellows, however paid, are not employees of the University.

Definition

Postdoctoral appointments are temporary positions with fixed end dates intended to provide a full-time program of advanced academic preparation and research training. A postdoctoral appointment is not

intended for long-term, indefinite, or career appointments, or for short-term appointments where the primary goal is to advance a principal investigator's research. Postdoctoral Researchers train under the direction and supervision of a faculty or other qualified mentor in preparation for academic or research careers. In addition to pursuing advanced preparation in research, Postdoctoral Researchers may be approved to engage in other activities to enhance teaching and other professional skills. To be the instructor of record in a course, a Postdoctoral Researcher must hold both a Postdoctoral Researcher title and an appropriate teaching appointment. Ordinarily, Postdoctoral Researchers are not permitted to serve as principal investigators on contracts or grants sponsored by agencies external to the University.

Responsibility

A faculty or other mentor is responsible for guiding and monitoring the advanced training of Postdoctoral Researchers. In that role, the mentor should make clear the goals, objectives, and expectations of the training program and the responsibilities of the Postdoctoral Researcher. The mentor should regularly and frequently communicate with Postdoctoral Researcher, provide regular and timely assessments of the Postdoctoral Researcher's performance, and provide career advice and job placement assistance. Requests by mentors for initial appointment of a Postdoctoral Researcher must be accompanied by a mentoring plan. The plan will be reviewed to assure that the activities fall within the Definition above.

The Provost has the authority to approve appointments and reappointments of Postdoctoral Researchers and to establish policies and guidelines that supplement this present policy. The Provost may expressly delegate to divisions and schools the authority to appoint, reappoint, or terminate Postdoctoral Researchers, all in a manner consistent with the requirements set forth below.

Titles

The title of a Postdoctoral Researcher appointment is determined by the requirements of the funding agencies.

Postdoctoral Scholar

An appointment is made in the title "Postdoctoral Scholar" when (1) the agency funding the salary requires or permits the appointee to be a University employee, or (2) whenever University discretionary funds are used to support the position. In their capacity as Postdoctoral Researchers, Postdoctoral Scholars are University employees.

Postdoctoral Fellow

An appointment is made in the title "Postdoctoral Fellow" when the Postdoctoral Researcher has been awarded a fellowship or traineeship for postdoctoral study by an extramural agency and the fellowship or traineeship is paid through a University account. In their capacity as Postdoctoral Researchers, Postdoctoral Fellows are not University employees.

Postdoctoral Fellow – Paid Direct:

An appointment is made in the title "Postdoctoral Fellow – Paid Direct" when the Postdoctoral Researcher has been awarded a fellowship or traineeship for postdoctoral study by an extramural agency and the agency pays the fellowship or traineeship directly to the Postdoctoral

Researcher, rather than through the University. In their capacity as Postdoctoral Researchers, Postdoctoral Fellows – Paid Direct are not University employees.

Appointment Criteria

Appointment as a Postdoctoral Scholar requires a doctoral degree (e.g., Ph.D., M.D.) or the foreign equivalent. Normally, individuals cease to be eligible for Postdoctoral Researcher positions seven years after the award of the degree. This requirement may be waived in special circumstances, such as when the individual has changed fields or had a career interruption.

An offer of employment as a Postdoctoral Scholar is conditional, subject to:

1. satisfactory presentation of documented evidence of personal identification and authorization to work in the United States, as required by Federal law;
2. appropriate evidence of having received the doctoral degree or other appropriate terminal degree; and
3. approval by the cognizant dean.

In cases where an offer of a Postdoctoral Researcher position is extended to an international candidate, the offer is contingent upon the candidate's having a valid visa. It is the responsibility of the candidate to ensure that he or she is at all times in compliance with requirements of the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services (BCIS - formerly called the Immigration and Naturalization Services or INS). For the duration of their relationship with the University, Postdoctoral Researchers are likewise responsible for ensuring compliance at all times with BCIS requirements. All candidates are screened for eligibility to participate in Medicare, Medicaid, and other government programs as required by our corporate integrity agreement with the federal government, and also in compliance with the Homeland Security Act of 2003.

Terms of Service

Postdoctoral Researcher appointments are temporary, have fixed end dates, and are subject to the following rules.

Appointments are typically made for a one-year term, renewable for up to three additional years until a fixed end date. Renewal for a fifth year requires a documented academic justification, a vote of the departmental faculty, and approval by the cognizant dean.

Extension of appointment beyond a total of five years is possible only when warranted by special circumstances, and requires documented academic justification, a vote of the department, approval by the dean, and approval by the Provost.

The total duration of an individual's postdoctoral experience may not exceed seven years, including postdoctoral work at other institutions. By exception, the Provost may grant an extension when justified by extraordinary circumstances, or when it has been documented that in the field or sub-field it is the norm that a third postdoctoral position precedes securing a faculty position in a comparable institution.

It is within the University's sole discretion not to reappoint a Postdoctoral Scholar (PDS). Reappointment normally is contingent upon various factors including but not limited to satisfactory performance

(including compliance with all applicable University policies), work authorization, availability of funding, and programmatic need. If the University decides not to reappoint a Postdoctoral Scholar after the fixed end date, his or her employment will end at that time and no further notice will be provided to that effect.

Salary and Stipend

Effective December 1, 2016, minimum salaries for all Postdoctoral Scholars must be at least \$47,478 per year (\$3,956.50 per month).

Criteria

Units are responsible for establishing the criteria for determining the salaries of individual Postdoctoral Scholars within the norms of the unit. Such criteria may include, but are not limited to, the individual's qualifications, experience, performance as a Postdoctoral Researcher, funding availability in the discipline, and competitive salaries and stipends paid by other universities.

When a salary is established for a Postdoctoral Scholar, equity among all appointees in the three Postdoctoral Researcher titles within the academic unit shall be taken into consideration.

Provision of Minimum Pay Level for Externally Funded Fellows

When extramural agencies establish stipends at a rate less than the unit-established pay minimum, and the University elects to proceed with such an appointment, the unit is required to provide additional funding to bring the pay level of the Postdoctoral Researcher up to the established minimum. The mentor is required to arrange the additional funding before the appointment start date.

Exceeding the Maximum

The maximum salary for a Postdoctoral Scholar is \$80,000. The Provost may approve a salary for a Postdoctoral Scholar or stipend for a Postdoctoral Fellow above the top of the authorized scale in exceptional instances.

Stipend Supplementation

A Postdoctoral Researcher in the Postdoctoral Fellow or Postdoctoral Fellow – Paid Direct title may have his or her stipend supplemented with additional funding beyond the scale minimum. Supplementation must conform to the terms of the fellowship or traineeship and, if paid with University funds, be paid in the Postdoctoral Scholar title. The sum of stipend and salary may not exceed the maximum of the scale and must be consistent with University criteria for determining the appropriate pay level of an individual Postdoctoral Scholar.

Annual Pay Increases

Salary increases may be given annually to Postdoctoral Scholars on the basis of merit in accordance with established procedures.

Increases to Postdoctoral Fellows should be provided in accordance with the provisions of the extramural funding agency.

Effort Percentage for Postdoctoral Scholars

Appointments to the Postdoctoral Scholar title are full time, based on the expectation that the Postdoctoral Scholar will be fully involved in scholarly pursuits. In special cases, upon written request of the appointee and concurrence of the mentor, the Provost may grant an exception when the appointee

is unable to make a full-time commitment for reasons of health, family responsibilities, or employment external to the University. Such a request must take into account extramural funding agency requirements, if any.

When a reduced-time appointment has been approved, the mentor and Postdoctoral Scholar shall sign a written agreement specifying the reduction in hours of work and concomitant responsibilities and compensation.

Teaching by Postdoctoral Researchers

Postdoctoral Researchers are of three kinds, determined primarily by the funding agency that supports the appointee. Their eligibility to teach, whether as instructors of record with the rank of Lecturer or as assistants, likewise follows the kind of funding.

Postdoctoral Scholar (PDS)

Because Postdoctoral Scholars are in a full-time program, at 100% effort, they may not teach except under the following conditions:

1. If teaching is required by the source of funding and is part of the program of training, then after appointment as a Lecturer (or other role) has been approved, the PDS may teach for no additional compensation, since the compensation for teaching is included in the regular salary. Mentoring of the teaching must be part of the mentoring plan.
2. If teaching is not part of the scope of work, then only if the source of funding allows a reduction of effort on the grant of 33% for one quarter for a Lecturer (some part of that for a TA or CA) may the PDS be appointed as Lecturer (or hired as a TA or CA). The compensation for the teaching effort should be the standard rate for an ad hoc Lecturer (or TA or CA): the salary rate for the sponsored research portion of the PDS's appointment need not be the same as the salary rate for teaching.

Postdoctoral Fellow (PDF)

PDFs are supported on stipends, and may do no work for the University in exchange for that stipend, or as "volunteers." They may not do part-time teaching as a Lecturer or in another role except under the following conditions:

1. If the funding source agrees to allow the PDF to do part time teaching in addition to the training program *while retaining the full stipend*, the PDF may accept an offer of a teaching (or TA or course assistant) position. A normal for-credit Lectureship is considered to be 33% effort. Units must use this benchmark when communicating with the source of funds regarding the PDF's intention to accept a job offer from the University.
2. The PDF's participation in or teaching of a course must be relevant to his or her training as a scientist-educator.
3. A teaching role may not be undertaken merely to supplement the PDF's stipend or offered to help a department cover its teaching responsibilities.
4. University policy does not allow PDFs to reduce effort in order to take a teaching role.

PDF - Paid Direct

These individuals may be hired for any job open to the public, and only through processes open to the public. Compensation must be comparable to what is paid to qualified people who have no existing relationship to the University.

Process for PDS and PDF part-time teaching assignments

Lecturer appointments (but not teaching assistant or course assistant jobs) must be in an appointive unit. Before the start of the quarter in which the teaching role is to begin, and before offering the PDS or PDF the appointment, the unit must obtain the approval of the Provost. In addition to the usual documentation, recommendations for appointment must include:

1. a memo from URA confirming that the specific plan for teaching is consistent with the funding source;
2. a copy of the notification sent to the funding source (not needed if the teaching salary is already in the SOW), including, when appropriate, the PI's description of how he or she will assure that a PDF's part-time work does not jeopardize the quality or quantity of time devoted to the research training; and
3. a copy of the mentoring plan that explains how the teaching activity will be mentored.

General Conditions

1. No PDS or PDF may teach more than one course per year as a Lecturer.
2. Teaching in any role by a PDS or PDF must be in an area closely related to the PDS's field, must be in furtherance of his or her training as a scientist and educator, and must be mentored.
3. The principles in this policy with regard to our obligations to funding sources are applicable to all forms of additional effort by PDSs and PDFs.

Notice of Appointment

A Postdoctoral Scholar shall be provided a written notice of appointment, which shall include the mentor's name, begin and end dates of the appointment, whether the appointment is renewable and the conditions for renewal, salary amount, source of funding, and work eligibility requirements for U.S. citizens and non-citizens. A copy of this present document and a summary of benefits, or corresponding website information, shall accompany the appointment notice. The Postdoctoral Scholar is required to accept the appointment in writing.

Postdoctoral Fellows and Postdoctoral Fellows – Paid Direct must accept in writing the terms on the Postdoctoral Fellow Appointment form.

Annual Reviews

To foster a Postdoctoral Researcher's career, the mentor shall conduct an annual review with the Postdoctoral Researcher. A written evaluation will be provided to the Postdoctoral Researcher upon request. Divisions and schools may require the following for such reviews:

- An assessment of the Postdoctoral Researcher's progress to date, strengths, areas needing improvement, potential for a research career in the discipline, and a summary of expectations and activities for the following year;

- That a written summary of the review shall be provided to and signed by the Postdoctoral Researcher;
- That a review will be conducted whenever a salary increase is proposed for a Postdoctoral Scholar. (Fellows' stipends normally rise each year, as the funding agency determines.);
- That any written evaluation will be maintained by the division, school or other central office.

Equal Opportunity, Nondiscrimination, and Diversity

The University of Chicago is a community of scholars dedicated to research, academic excellence, and the pursuit and cultivation of learning. Committed to an academic environment that provides equal opportunity, the University of Chicago promotes a diversity of backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences among faculty and other academic appointees, staff, Postdoctoral Researchers, and the student body. Unlawful discrimination, including harassment, compromises the integrity of the University and violates its principles.

In keeping with its long-standing traditions and policies, the University of Chicago considers students, employees, applicants for admission or employment, and those seeking access to programs on the basis of individual merit. The University, therefore, does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national or ethnic origin, age, disability, or veteran status, and does not discriminate against members of protected classes under the law. (The University of Chicago Policy on Harassment, Discrimination, and Sexual Misconduct can be found online [here](#).)

Units are encouraged to use departmental or laboratory Web sites to post postdoctoral positions to promote equal opportunity for all candidates. Units should strive to have an inclusive, supportive environment that provides postdoctoral training opportunities that maximize and value the potential of all Postdoctoral Researchers.

Corrective Action, Discipline and/or Dismissal

1. The University may impose corrective action, or dismiss a Postdoctoral Researcher when, in its reasoned judgment, the Postdoctoral Researcher's performance or conduct merits the action. The University may take other action consistent with requirements of any applicable extramural funding agencies.
2. Each division or school may establish and issue additional procedures for instituting corrective action and dismissal of Postdoctoral Scholars in accord with applicable University policies and with the standards and procedures set forth in this section.
3. Corrective action, designed to identify and correct problems that affect a Postdoctoral Researcher's performance, is the institution of one or more of the following:
 - Counseling or verbal warning,
 - Written warning, which is a communication that informs the Postdoctoral Researcher of the nature of the inadequate performance or misconduct; requirements for continuation in the training program; and the probable consequence of continued inadequate performance or misconduct.

- Reduction in salary for a stated period of time. The amount and duration of the reduced salary or stipend shall be specified.
 - Suspension, which is removal from the training program without pay for a stated period of time. The terms of a suspension may include loss of normal privileges, such as access to University property and parking, IT and library privileges.
4. Depending on the situation, any or all of the above forms of corrective action may be repeated, omitted, or taken out of sequence; however, notwithstanding anything in Sections e-h immediately below, the University has the right to initiate immediate termination if, in its reasoned judgment, such action is warranted (e.g., a situation involving workplace violence, misappropriation of or compromise to research data). Each case is considered on an individual basis and normally involves advance consultation with decanal academic and administrative personnel
 5. Dismissal is the termination of a Postdoctoral Researcher's appointment initiated by the University, before the appointment end date, when, in the reasoned judgment of the University, the Postdoctoral Researcher's conduct or performance does not justify continuation.
 6. Before instituting corrective action, discipline, or dismissal, informal efforts to resolve the problem should be made, where appropriate and practicable.
 7. A Postdoctoral Researcher may be placed on immediate leave with pay, without prior written notice, for the purpose of reviewing or investigating conduct that in the University's judgment requires removing the Postdoctoral Researcher from University premises. While on such leave, the Postdoctoral Researcher's return to University premises without written permission may create independent grounds for dismissal. Such leave shall be confirmed in writing after it is instituted and may include interim loss of other privileges (e.g., IT access).
 8. Except as set forth in Section d above, before initiating the actions of suspension without pay, reduction in salary, dismissal, or other actions consistent with the requirements of extramural fellowship agencies, the University shall provide a written notice to the Postdoctoral Researcher. The notice shall state:
 - the intended action and the proposed effective date;
 - the reason(s) for the action, including a description of the inadequate performance or misconduct and any warnings that have been given;
 - the Postdoctoral Researcher's right to respond either orally or in writing within five calendar days of the date of issuance of the written notice;
 - the name of the person to whom the Postdoctoral Researcher should respond.

No notice is required for counseling, a verbal or written warning, or suspension with pay.

A Postdoctoral Researcher who receives a written notice shall be entitled to respond, either orally or in writing, within five calendar days of the date of issuance of the notice. The response, if any, shall be reviewed and considered by the administration.

If the University decides to implement the corrective action or dismissal following the review of a timely response, if any, from the Postdoctoral Researcher, the University shall issue, as soon as practicable but normally within five calendar days of the decision a written notice to the Postdoctoral Researcher of the decision and the effective date of the corrective action or dismissal.

This written notice normally may not include an action more severe than that described in initial notice.

A copy of the written notice shall also be placed in the Postdoctoral Researcher's personnel file.

Upon written request and before expiration of any time limits stated in this section, the Provost or his or her designee may grant extensions, as appropriate.

Statutes contained in the University Statutes related to termination of employment that are applicable to "Faculty and Other academic Appointees" do not apply to Postdoctoral Researchers. Likewise, termination- and discipline-related personnel policies for staff employees (e.g., policies U208, U703, U704, etc.), do not apply to Postdoctoral Researchers. When authority to appoint Postdoctoral Researchers has been expressly delegated by the Provost to a dean, the Provost is not required to approve dismissal. The Provost will not review an action of dismissal unless he/she agrees to do so upon the request of the cognizant dean.

Leave Policies

Childbearing, Parental, and Family and Medical Leave

Postdoctoral Scholars may become eligible for childbearing leave, parental leave, and for family and medical leave. See [Personnel Policy U522](#).

Postdoctoral Scholars who have been Postdoctoral Researchers for 12 continuous months but who are ineligible for FMLA because they were Postdoctoral Fellows during any part of the 12 months before the date on which the requested leave is to begin, may request up to 12 consecutive weeks of unpaid leave for the birth of the employee's child.

Childbearing, parental, and family and medical leave policies for Postdoctoral Fellows and Postdoctoral Fellows – Paid Direct are subject to the requirements or limitations of the extramural funding agency.

Holiday

Official holidays for Postdoctoral Researchers are those administrative holidays published in the University Calendar.

Jury Leave

See Personnel Policy [U504](#).

Military Leave

See Personnel Policy [U517](#) and [U518](#).

Sick Leave

Postdoctoral Scholars are eligible for paid sick leave of up to twelve days per twelve-month appointment period. Sick leave does not accrue and any balance remaining at the time the Postdoctoral Scholar's appointment ends is forfeited.

Postdoctoral Researchers with appointments of less than twelve months are eligible for sick leave in proportion to the appointment period; for example, a Postdoctoral Scholar with a six-month appointment is eligible for up to six days of sick leave.

For “Postdoctoral Scholars,” unused sick leave shall be carried forward to subsequent Postdoctoral Scholar appointments.

Sick leave shall be used in keeping with normally approved purposes, including personal illness; medical appointments; and, childbearing. It may not be used to care for others who are ill. Sick leave may be used for bereavement for a Postdoctoral Researcher’s child, parent, spouse, domestic partner, sibling, grandparent or grandchild. Sick leave shall be recorded in one-day increments when it is used.

Unless the extramural funding agency has different sick-leave requirements, Postdoctoral Fellows and Postdoctoral Fellows – Paid Direct are also eligible for paid sick leave of up to twelve days per twelve-month appointment period, subject to the guidelines above.

Time Off

Postdoctoral Scholars do not accrue vacation time. Postdoctoral Scholars are expected to take time off each academic year in the periods between quarters, up to four weeks per year. If, however, the Postdoctoral Scholar’s research program involves work during these periods, it is expected that the mentor will approve equivalent time off at another mutually agreeable time. Unless the extramural funding agency contains provisions to the contrary, Postdoctoral Fellows and Postdoctoral Fellows – Paid Direct are eligible to take time off under these same conditions. Any time off balance remaining at the time the Postdoctoral Researcher’s appointment ends is forfeited.

Benefits

Retirement Plan Membership

“Postdoctoral Scholars” are eligible for staff retirement benefits. “Postdoctoral Fellows” and “Postdoctoral Fellows – Paid Direct” are ineligible for University retirement plans.

Benefits Plans

All Postdoctoral Researchers are eligible for designated health-care and other benefit plans through the University of Chicago Postdoctoral Researcher Benefit Program.

Other Policies

Other Personnel Policies applicable to Postdoctoral Scholars include but are not limited to [U103](#), [U201](#), [U206](#), [U401](#), [U402](#), [U514](#), [U521](#), [U601](#), [U603](#), [U604](#), [U606](#), and [U1004](#). An index of all Personnel Policies may be accessed [here](#).

The University’s [academic fraud](#), [academic misconduct](#), [conflict of interest](#), and, [FCPA](#) policies are applicable to Postdoctoral Researchers