

Postdoctoral Scholars Policy

Category: Academic
Responsible Office: Postdoctoral Scholars
Responsible Executive: Provost

Date Established: 12/03/2008
Date Last Updated: 04/08/2021

Summary

Postdoctoral study encompasses scholarship and training. This policy defines the postdoctoral scholar role and guides the appointment process.

Policy Statement

The University at Buffalo (UB, university) is committed to providing a supportive and productive training environment for our community of postdoctoral scholars. Postdoctoral appointees contribute to the academic community by enhancing the research and education programs of the university. They bring expertise, insights, and creativity that enrich the research and educational environment for all members of the university community, including graduate and undergraduate students. The university strives to provide a stimulating, positive, and constructive experience for the postdoctoral appointee by emphasizing the shared commitment and responsibility of the institution, faculty, and scholar.

Appointment of a Postdoctoral Scholar

A Postdoctoral Scholar's appointment must meet the following conditions:

- At the time of the appointment, the appointee must have been awarded an advanced degree (or completed all the requirements of such), most typically within the past five years from the appointment, such as a Ph.D., M.D., or equivalent (e.g., Sc.D., M.D., D.D.S., J.D., Pharm.D.) in an appropriate field.
- The appointment is temporary and may not exceed a period of five years; it is also contingent on satisfactory performance and existence of funding.
 - Periods that a postdoctoral scholar is on an approved leave of absence may not be counted towards the five-year period. Determinations will be made by the Postdoctoral Office on a case-by-case basis.
 - In the event that the postdoctoral activities are disrupted for a significant period of time due to unforeseen situations at the institution, such time may not be counted towards the five-year period.
 - In rare circumstances, a one-year extension may be granted on a case-by-case basis based on performance and existence of funding. Requests for extensions must be reviewed and approved by the Postdoctoral Office.
- The appointment is full-time. Requests for part time appointments must be reviewed and approved by the Postdoctoral Office in consultation with Human Resources.
- The appointee works under the supervision of one or more faculty or principal investigator (PI) mentors.
- The appointment may be part of a clinical training program, if research training under the supervision of a mentor is a primary purpose of the appointment

Designated Titles

Designated titles for postdoctoral appointments are *Postdoctoral Associate* and *Postdoctoral Fellow*. A postdoctoral fellow holds a fellowship and may be paid through the Research Foundation (RF), the UB Foundation (UBF), a special allocation of state funds, or directly to the individual from the funding organization (i.e., Postdoctoral Fellow Direct Pay). Postdoctoral fellows are affiliates of the institution and must comply with all UB policies and rules.

Postdoctoral associate is the usual designation for all other postdoctoral appointments that do not fall under the Fellow titles.

Recruitment and Hiring

All postdoctoral associate positions must be posted through UBJobs, with the exception of those who are transferring to UB when a faculty member of another institution is hired by UB. The PI or faculty mentor must:

- Comply with all federal, state, and sponsor guidelines
- Consult with UB Human Resources to follow best hiring practices and procedures, and to confirm that the appointment has been integrated within the UB administrative system for the scholar to have access to UB resources (e.g., identification card, email address, library access)
- Notify the Office of Postdoctoral Scholars of all postdoctoral appointments within the first month of the appointment
- Consult with the UB Office of Immigration Services (UBIS) when recruiting and appointing international scholars to follow their established procedures and requirements for compliance with the USA immigration policies and regulations. A letter from the Office of Postdoctoral Scholars that confirms that the international scholar has been approved to hold the Postdoctoral Scholar title must be provided to UBIS in order to initiate the consultation.

Compensation

The minimum full-time annual salary for a postdoctoral fellow is typically set and subject to the sponsor agency guidelines. The compensation for postdoctoral associates is typically guided by the minimum salary thresholds established by New York State and the applicable Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA). The Postdoctoral Office will determine the minimum salary limit suggested for a postdoctoral scholar.

Goals of Postdoctoral Traineeship

Goals of postdoctoral traineeship are to provide advanced research training beyond the doctoral degree and to prepare individuals to follow careers that require expertise in their field. The postdoctoral experience is a unique “apprenticeship” between sponsor and trainee. Faculty sponsors help prepare postdocs for the next step in their careers.

Training and Career Development

Training is a central component of the postdoc experience. It provides the opportunity for postdoctoral scholars and fellows to enhance research skills critical to pursue careers as independent investigators or other related careers. All postdoctoral scholars are expected to actively engage in both training and career development. It is recommended that within the first thirty days of the appointment, the postdoctoral scholars write an Individual Development Plan (IDP) and discuss this with their faculty mentor. The mentor should meet with the postdoctoral scholar at regular intervals to assess progress and goals. The postdoctoral scholar should provide their mentor, at least once annually, with a progress report of their research and professional development, as well as goals for the next reporting cycle. State-funded postdoctoral scholars who hold a United University Professions (UUP) position with performance program requirements can address the progress report during their performance evaluation. The Office of Postdoctoral Scholars will also provide professional development programs to enhance the postdoctoral training and experience.

Workplace Issues

For resolution of workplace complaints and disputes, postdoctoral scholars can seek advice from the Office of Postdoctoral Scholars. Some issues (e.g., sexual harassment and discriminatory allegations) may require the direct reporting and intervention of the appropriate UB office (e.g., Employee Relations, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion).

Discontinuation of Appointment of a Postdoctoral Scholar

Discontinuation With Notice

A postdoctoral scholar may have their appointment ended at any time. It is recommended that at least four weeks written notice be given when funding is expected to end. Less time notice (two to three weeks) could be given for failure to adhere to the required and outlined expectations of the appointment and university-wide guidelines. State-funded postdoctoral scholars covered under UUP contract follow appropriate guidelines established under such contract.

Termination of Appointment for Cause

A postdoctoral scholar may have their appointment immediately terminated at any time if they are found to have violated the obligations specified in this or other UB policy. Such violations include egregious actions, including scientific misconduct, stealing, sexual harassment, and inappropriate behavior. Managers and supervisors should use reasonable judgment to decide whether an employee's action may be remedied by some form of progressive discipline (for RF appointments, see the *Research Foundation Progressive Discipline Policy*). Discontinuation of appointment for cause must be preceded by written notice and in consultation with the UB Employee Relations Office.

Background

The university hosts postdoctoral scholars in many different departments, schools, and centers. While the university seeks to provide postdocs with the opportunity to continue their academic and research training through on-site practice experience, many aspects of the relationship between the university and its postdocs are also that of an employer-employee relationship. Given the hybrid nature of the association between postdocs and the university, this policy provides guidance on the obligations and expectations of those involved in postdoc training.

Applicability

This policy applies to individuals with the title of Postdoctoral Associate or Postdoctoral Fellow and the faculty who supervise and mentor these individuals.

Definitions

Postdoctoral Associate

Individual holding a doctoral degree who is engaged in a defined temporary period of mentored research and/or scholarly training for the purpose of acquiring the professional skills needed to pursue a career path of their choosing. Postdoctoral associates train under the direction and supervision of faculty mentors in preparation for academic or research careers. Postdoctoral Associate and Senior Postdoctoral Associate are titles that can be used for this classification. For the purpose of payment, the postdoctoral associate is considered an employee of the institution and receives a paycheck every two weeks through payroll, payroll taxes are withheld, and may be eligible for certain benefits consistent with the fiscal agent appointment type.

Postdoctoral Fellow

Appointment of a postdoctoral scholar when the postdoc has been awarded a fellowship or traineeship for postdoctoral study by an extramural agency and the fellowship or traineeship is paid through an RF account. A postdoctoral fellow is not considered an employee and taxes are not withheld (exceptions may apply to non-resident aliens) although they may be entitled to certain benefits.

Postdoctoral Fellow Paid Direct

An appointment is made as a fellow paid direct when the postdoc 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 postdoc, rather than through the RF. The fellow is not considered an employee of the institution.

Postdoctoral Fellowship

Competitive award of financial support to an individual which provides a stipend and in some cases money for benefits coverage. Although postdoctoral fellowships may be awarded on the basis of a proposed research program, they are not awarded to accomplish a specific statement of work. Postdoctoral fellowships are awarded on a merit basis to assist a scholar in their professional training and development.

Postdoctoral Scholar

Individual with the title of Postdoctoral Associate or Postdoctoral Fellow.

Principal Investigator

UB faculty or staff member who bears responsibility for the intellectual leadership of a project. The PI accepts overall responsibility for directing the research, financial oversight, and compliance with relevant university policies and sponsor terms and conditions.

Responsibility

Office of Postdoctoral Scholars

- Provide guidance for postdoctoral scholars.
- Oversee this policy and ensure consistent application across the university.

Postdoctoral Scholars

- Perform research responsibilities and assigned duties, as summarized in the letter of appointment and any subsequent renewals or revisions of the letter of appointment.
- Engage in open and timely discussion with faculty mentor regarding all aspects of research progress.
- Adhere to ethical standards in research.
- Comply with all applicable university policies, procedures, and best practices.
- Demonstrate collegial conduct towards coworkers and members of the research group.

Faculty Mentor

- Facilitate the postdoctoral scholar training and the discharge of the above obligations.
- Provide a formal discussion of the postdoctoral scholar progress and performance at least once a year.
- Emphasize education, promote development of independence in research, and career advancement of the postdoctoral scholar.
- Notify the Office of Postdoctoral Scholars within one month of any new postdoctoral appointments.

UB Human Resources

- Determine that postdoctoral associates and fellows are classified and appointed correctly in coordination with the PI and office of Sponsored Project Services.
- Provide administrative information and consultation to PIs related to appointment and termination of postdoctoral appointments.

Contact Information

Contact	Phone	Email
Office of Postdoctoral Scholars Sandra J. Flash, Ph.D.	716-645-6872	sflash@buffalo.edu
Employee Relations	716-645-4462	putrino@buffalo.edu
Equity, Diversity and Inclusion	716-645-2266	diversity@buffalo.edu
Human Resources	716-645-7777	ub-hr@buffalo.edu
Immigration Services	716-645-2355	immgsvc@buffalo.edu

Related Information

University Links

[Equity, Diversity and Inclusion](#)

[Immigration Services](#)

[Office of Postdoctoral Scholars](#)

[Responsible Conduct in Research, Intellectual, and Creative Activity Policy](#)

[UB Jobs](#)

Related Links

[My IDP – Science Careers - Individual Development Plan](#)

[National Postdoctoral Association](#)

[Research Foundation Implementing the Progressive Discipline Policy](#)

[Research Foundation Postdoctoral Employee and Fellow Policies and Practices Policy](#)

[Research Foundation Progressive Discipline Policy](#)

[Research Foundation Resolving Discrimination, Harassment, and Retaliation Complaints](#)

[Research Foundation Resolving Workplace Concerns Procedure](#)

[US Department of Labor – Wages and the Fair Labor Standards Act](#)

History

April 2021

Full review. Updated the policy to:

- Add an overarching policy statement.
- Add the following details regarding the period of appointment
 - Periods that a postdoctoral scholar is on an approved leave of absence may not be counted towards the five-year period. Determinations will be made by the Postdoctoral Office on a case-by-case basis.
 - In the event that the postdoctoral activities are disrupted by a significant period of time due to unforeseen situations at the institution, such time may not be counted towards the five-year period.
 - In rare circumstances, a one-year extension may be granted on a case-by-case basis based on performance and existence of funding. Requests for extensions must be reviewed and approved by the Postdoctoral Office.
- Remove appointment and extension periods
- Clarify that all postdoctoral associate positions must be posted through UBJobs, with the exception of those who are transferring to UB when a faculty member of another institution is hired by UB (Recruitment and Hiring section)
- Remove the minimum salary amount
- Remove the Leaves section
- Add the Goals of Postdoctoral Traineeship, Training and Career Development, and Background sections
- Clarify that State-funded postdoctoral scholars who hold a United University Professions (UUP) position with performance program

requirements can address the progress report during their performance evaluation (Training and Career Development section)

- Clarify that State-funded postdoctoral scholars covered under UUP contract follow appropriate guidelines established under such contract (Discontinuation With Notice section)
- Add faculty mentors to the Applicability section
- Remove Appendices

December 2013 Updated for minor text changes.

November 2011 Updated Office of Equity, Diversity and Affirmative Action (EDAAA) department name to reflect the current name of: Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI).

Presidential Approval

Satish K. Tripathi, President

Date