

Guidelines for Postdoctoral Associates and Postdoctoral Scholars

Office of the Provost
University of Pittsburgh

Effective: July 2005*

DEFINITIONS

Postdoctoral education is an important element in the research and scholarship environment at the University of Pittsburgh. In general, a postdoctoral appointment provides a recent Ph.D. graduate with opportunities to continue development of his or her research skills, learn new research techniques, and work under the supervision of a senior research faculty member. While developing their own professional skills, postdoctoral appointees provide significant contributions to the research enterprise, including the discovery and creation of new knowledge, and by providing research direction to both undergraduate and graduate students.

Postdoctoral Associates (PDA) and Postdoctoral Scholars (PDS), non-faculty positions at the University of Pittsburgh, are defined below in accordance with the Association of American Universities, Committee on Postdoctoral Education, Report and Recommendations¹:

- The appointee was recently awarded a Ph.D. or equivalent doctorate (e.g., Sc.D., M.D., or D.V.M.) in an appropriate field; and
- the appointment involves substantially full-time research or scholarship; and
- the appointment is a transition position and is viewed as preparatory for an academic and/or research career; and
- the appointment is not part of a clinical training program; and
- the appointee works under the supervision of a faculty member; and
- the appointee has the freedom and is expected to publish the results of his/her research during the period of appointment.

Postdoctoral Associate (PDA): a postdoctoral appointment meeting the above listed requirements and supported on research funds, external or internal, in return for duties performed to meet the goals for which the funds were awarded. As such, the PDA is an employee of the University and paid through the University (with a fringe benefit rate collected on the salary).

Postdoctoral Scholar (PDS): a postdoctoral appointment meeting the above listed requirements and supported from an external grant that prohibits the individual from being considered an employee (as determined by the Office of Research or other entity), or from a grant whose funding source does not permit collection of a fringe benefit rate, or is being paid a stipend by an agency outside the University. For example, a PDS may include persons supported by training grants or individual postdoctoral fellowships.

APPOINTMENT GUIDELINES

A Postdoctoral Associate or Postdoctoral Scholar (PDA/PDS) must receive a letter that states the general conditions of the appointment and specifies the following: title of the appointment, salary, fringe benefits, appointment start and end dates (duration), general duties, and other pertinent terms of the appointment. The letter of appointment should outline the scope of the anticipated research project and the PDA/PDS's role within it. If there are expectations with respect to teaching responsibilities, these should be included, along with the amount of compensation for this activity and the funding source. If the position is supported by external funds, the source of external funds should be stated as well as that these funds are available for the duration of the appointment. The letter of appointment should be jointly signed by the faculty mentor/principal investigator² and the department chair or other responsible University official. The letter of appointment should be sent in duplicate. If the appointment is accepted, he/she must sign one copy and return it to the designated authority. When an appointment is accepted, the terms shall be binding on both the PDA/PDS and the faculty mentor/principal investigator. A copy of this document (*Guidelines for Postdoctoral Associates and Postdoctoral Scholars*) should be included with the appointment letter.

Appointment Requirements: The Immigration Reform and Control Act requires employers to institute procedures for verifying that a job applicant is authorized to be employed in the United States. A PDA/PDS is required to produce the necessary documentation that he or she is either a US citizen or authorized to be employed in the United States as a condition of the appointment. Please refer to University Policy and Procedure 07-01-04, *Employment Eligibility Verification: Immigration Reform and Control Act* (<http://www.pitt.edu/HOME/PP/policies/07/07-01-04.html>).

REAPPOINTMENT GUIDELINES

Initial PDA/PDS appointments should normally be no longer than two years in duration. As a general rule, the total time spent in postdoctoral appointments by a given individual should not exceed four years. Exceptions to such guidelines should be granted only after careful review by the department and the dean of the relevant school.

During the course of postdoctoral education and training, it is recognized that the source of funding for this appointment may vary, such that the individual may move from PDA to PDS status and vice versa, with an associated change in benefits. While a change in postdoctoral employment classification does not necessarily impact the scope, responsibilities and duration of this position, such a change requires that the individual be notified in writing in accordance with the above appointment letter guidelines. The faculty mentor and the department should make every effort to inform the PDA/PDS in advance of any implications for certain benefits.

The regulations that pertain to original appointments apply to reappointments and should also be governed by the following considerations:

- Reappointment requires satisfactory research or scholarship performance as determined by the faculty mentor and continuation of funding for the position.
- Reappointment should be made at the same or higher salary.
- Written notice from the faculty mentor and department chair of reappointment or of non-reappointment, including an explanation of the circumstances, should be provided at least 90 days prior to the end of the current contract. Extending delay of this notification should be granted only with the mutual agreement of the PDA/PDS, the faculty mentor and the department chair, for specific reasons made clear to the PDA/PDS.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Each party to the appointment bears certain responsibilities. See the Appendix, *Suggested Good Practices for Postdoctoral Associates and Postdoctoral Scholars*, for an elaboration of good practices optimally exercised by the faculty mentor and by the PDA/PDS.

Faculty Mentor: Moving a junior scientist and/or scholar toward an independent, productive and satisfying career is the goal of postdoctoral training. The faculty mentor has the responsibility of providing a postdoctoral training experience that will foster the individual's intellectual, technical and professional development. Annual performance evaluations should be conducted by the faculty mentor for each PDA/PDS, and a statement of objectives for the ensuing year should be jointly developed by the individual and the faculty mentor. This performance evaluation should be conducted according to departmental and school policies.

PDA/PDSs shall not be exploited nor their research and scholarship training compromised in the service of sponsored research or the financial gain of the faculty mentor.

Postdoctoral Associates/Postdoctoral Scholars: The PDA/PDS has full responsibility for actuating his/her postdoctoral training and should carefully investigate the details of the position, including the expected responsibilities, opportunities for professional development, and the expected nature and quality of mentorship to be provided by the faculty mentor. The individual is responsible for meeting the obligations and expectations provided in the letter of appointment and in initial discussions with the faculty mentor and for adhering to all University policies regarding research conduct.

Department: The department is responsible for oversight of the postdoctoral appointment letter. It is also the responsibility of the department to contribute to providing an environment that supports a high-quality postdoctoral training experience. The department provides oversight for annual postdoctoral performance evaluations, as well as for decisions relating to reappointments and terminations.

School: It is the responsibility of the school to support the efforts of the department to provide a high-quality postdoctoral training environment. The school should provide oversight to ensure that the highest standards for postdoctoral training are being met, as exemplified by monitoring best practices at comparable peer institutions.

GRIEVANCE SITUATIONS

This section covers two grievance categories: Unfair Treatment and Early Termination of Appointment. It should be noted that such issues as sexual harassment, creation of a hostile work environment, or discrimination based on race, sex, ethnic origin, age or handicap, are subjects of separate University policies and therefore are not considered as grievance situations within the scope of this document. (See the next section, "Campus Workplace Policies and Procedures," for information on specific policies and procedures relating to these issues.)

Unfair Treatment: A PDA/PDS who believes that he or she has been treated unfairly should first discuss the problem with the faculty mentor and the department chair. Each school should designate a faculty member, or member of the administration experienced in postdoctoral education, whose duties are to serve as a resource to the PDA/PDS in addressing and resolving grievances. If a resolution can not be reached at either the departmental level or through the efforts of the designated resource person,

the PDA/PDS should present the grievance to the dean for informal evaluation and, as necessary, adjudication. The determination by the dean is the final step in the grievance process.

Early Termination of Appointment: Early termination refers to the dismissal of a PDA/PDS prior to the end date of the contractual period of appointment. Early termination may be initiated only if the PDA/PDS has received an appropriate and timely written warning with respect to his or her performance, or has clearly violated one of the major canons of institutional responsibility or University Policy. The PDA/PDS must be informed in writing of the reasons for the termination. The termination letter must be signed by the faculty mentor and co-signed by the department chair. The appeals procedure must be included with the early termination letter.

The appeals procedure for early termination is as follows: (1) The PDA/PDS must appeal to the dean in writing within two weeks of receiving the notification of termination. (2) The dean or his/her designee will appoint a panel of two faculty members and two PDA/PDSs recommended by the University of Pittsburgh Postdoctoral Association (UPPDA). The dean or his or her designee will serve as chair. No one from the involved academic department shall be eligible to serve on the appeals panel. All involved parties shall represent themselves before the panel. (3) Within six weeks of filing the appeal with the dean, the appellant shall be provided with a hearing, and subsequently shall be notified of the panel's findings and recommendation. The dean's decision will be rendered in a timely fashion, and the appellant so notified as soon thereafter as possible. The dean's decision is the final step in the appeals process.

CAMPUS WORPLACE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

As members of the University community, it is important that PDA/PDSs are familiar with the following policies and procedures, as well as their potential roles and responsibilities in the University workplace:

- 07-01-03, *Nondiscrimination, Equal Opportunity, and Affirmative Action* (<http://www.pitt.edu/HOME/PP/policies/07/07-01-03.html>)
- 07-06-04, *Sexual Harassment* (<http://www.pitt.edu/HOME/PP/policies/07/07-06-04.html>)
- 07-01-03, *Nondiscrimination and Anti-Harassment Procedure* (<http://www.pitt.edu/HOME/PP/procedures/07/07-01-03.html>)
- 06-03-03, *Harassment by Telecommunication* (<http://www.pitt.edu/HOME/PP/policies/06/06-03-03.html>)
- 02-04-03, *Faculty-Student Relationships* (<http://www.pitt.edu/HOME/PP/policies/02/02-04-03.html>)
- 10-02-05, *Computer Access and Use*, and 10-02-99, *Access of Obscene Material* (<http://www.pitt.edu/HOME/PP/policies/10/10-02-05.html> and <http://www.pitt.edu/HOME/PP/policies/10/10-02-99.html>)

PDA/PDSs are also encouraged to complete the online sexual harassment training program described at <http://training.newmedialearning.com/psh/pitt/>.

RESEARCH INTEGRITY

The University seeks excellence in pursuit of knowledge and scholarship and requires all members of the University community to adhere to the highest standards of responsible conduct and integrity in research. Should a violation of research integrity and/or research misconduct appear to occur, the University of Pittsburgh Research Integrity Policy (<http://www.pitt.edu/HOME/PP/policies/11/11-01-01.html>) contains the details of procedures to be followed. This Policy applies to all PDA/PDS

positions. Research misconduct is defined as: (1) fabrication, falsification, plagiarism and other practices that seriously deviate from those that are commonly accepted in the scientific community for proposing, conducting or reporting research; (2) material failure to comply with federal requirements for the protection of researchers, human subjects or the public or for the welfare of laboratory animals; and (3) failure to meet other material legal requirements governing research.

A PDA/PDS should make every effort to receive training in research protocol issues, including training in responsible conduct; IRB and IACUC issues; and intellectual property issues, including conflict of interest. Training may be provided by the faculty mentor, the home department, the school and the University, and should be supported by the faculty mentor.

All PDAs and PDSs must also subscribe to the principles with respect to responsible authorship and publications practices that are set forth in Research Integrity (Formerly RPF Module 1), Chapter 1, "Responsible Authorship and Publication Practices," available through <http://rpf.health.pitt.edu> and the *Guidelines for Ethical Practices in Research*, 4. Authorship and Other Publication Practices, available at <http://www.pitt.edu/~provost/ethresearch.html>.

APPLICATION FOR RESEARCH GRANTS AND AWARDS: A PDA/PDS may serve as the designated principal investigator (PI) on an application for a fellowship to support his or her salary, e.g., a National Research Service Award, and also may serve as co-investigator of an application for other external funding.

PATENT RIGHTS: Patent rights resulting from research conducted in whole or in part by a PDA/PDS are subject to the University of Pittsburgh Patent Rights and Technology Transfer Policy (<http://www.pitt.edu/HOME/PP/policies/11/11-02-01.html>). It should be noted that data collected as part of the assigned research duties of the PDA or as part of postdoctoral training and education are the property of the University, including original research notebooks and electronic files. Patent rights resulting from externally-sponsored research grants, contracts, or other such arrangements are also subject to the terms of those agreements. The faculty mentor should make every effort to give fair credit to the PDA/PDS for his/her research and scholarly contribution to a creative work.

SALARIES

Appointments of Postdoctoral Associates and Postdoctoral Scholars shall normally be made on a full-time basis. The minimum and maximum base salary is set annually by the Provost, and the maximum level may only be exceeded in accordance with school policies and with the approval of the dean. Within the announced range, each year the level of compensation will be reconsidered and adjustments made as appropriate and financially feasible. Full-time base salaries below the recommended minimum are not permitted.

It should be recognized that part-time PDA/PDS positions are only permitted on an occasional, case-by-case basis with the approval of the dean.

HEALTH INSURANCE COVERAGE

The University is committed to ensuring that all postdoctoral appointees have access to a comprehensive health care plan for themselves and their families. PDAs and PDSs who receive full-time or fractional appointments are eligible to participate in the University's health insurance plan for faculty and staff. The University will provide individual coverage at an assigned cost to the individual. Family coverage (for spouses and dependent children) is available by paying the supplemental premium per University guidelines. To enroll in the individual or family plan, the PDA/PDS must

complete an enrollment form. PDA/PDSs who participate in the University health insurance plan may elect to purchase optional dental and vision coverage. As non-employees, the value of the Postdoctoral Scholars' University contribution to health insurance is subject to IRS reporting as imputed income.

ACCESS TO UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES, RECREATIONAL FACILITIES, COMPUTING AND TRANSPORTATION SERVICES

The University photo I.D. card issued to all PDA/PDSs guarantees access to the University libraries and recreational facilities on the same basis as faculty members and staff. They will also receive e-mail accounts and access to the University's computing and network services. In accordance with the University's current contract with Port Authority Transit of Allegheny County, the University I.D. card can also be used to access PAT bus services in a manner comparable to faculty, staff and students.

OTHER BENEFITS

Vacation/Personal Days/Sick Days/University Holidays and University Holiday Recess

A PDA/PDS on a 12-month contract receives 20 compensated days annually that can be used for vacation, personal days, brief sick day periods, and University-wide holidays and the Holidays recess. Other than sick days, University holidays and the Holiday recess, these compensated days must be taken at times that are approved by the faculty mentor. More protracted illnesses are covered by the medical leave provision outlined in the next section.

Medical/Maternity/Family Leaves

In concert with the federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), PDA/PDSs who have been appointed for at least 12 months and have served a minimum of 1,250 hours in the preceding 12 months are eligible for a total of 12 weeks per year of unpaid leave for a serious health condition, or a family member's serious health condition, and/or for the birth or adoption of a PDA/PDS's child. PDA/PDSs are subject to the same FMLA procedures and requirements as regular University staff. Additional information on FMLA is available online at <http://www.dol.gov/elaws/esa/fmla/faq.asp>

Certain funding agencies may provide paid sick days for PDSs on an annual basis.

Retirement Plan Participation

As University employees, Postdoctoral Associates appointed prior to July 1, 2005, remain eligible to participate in the University's contributory pension plan. The University's contribution under the plan is subject to a specified vesting period. Information on retirement plan options is available online (<http://www.hr.pitt.edu/benefits/retirement.htm>) or from the Office of Human Resources.

Effective July 1, 2005, newly appointed Postdoctoral Associates will not be eligible for the University's 401(a) matching contribution plan but continue to have the option of placing pre-tax contributions in the University's 403(b) tax-deferred savings plan with either TIAA-CREF or Vanguard. Postdoctoral Associates and Postdoctoral Scholars will also have the option of placing after-tax contributions in a Traditional Individual Retirement Account (IRA) with either TIAA-CREF or Vanguard up to the specified Internal Revenue Service limit. The University will provide supporting administrative services, including enrollment guidance and establishment of payroll deductions. Under this option, both Postdoctoral Scholars and Associates may be subject to favorable tax treatment in accordance with IRS guidelines upon filing annual income tax returns. A post-tax Roth IRA will also be made available in lieu of the traditional IRA. The tax implications of choosing one of these options should be explored with a personal tax advisor or investment counselor.

As University employees, Postdoctoral Associates who are not eligible for the 401(a) University matching contributions will remain eligible for the University's Non-contributory Defined Benefit Pension Plan. Receipt of benefits under the Defined Benefit Pension Plan is contingent on meeting a specified vesting period.

Life Insurance

Postdoctoral Associates and Postdoctoral Scholars are provided with the University paid basic group life insurance coverage at one times base salary up to a maximum of \$50,000. Additionally, both categories are eligible for participant-paid optional life insurance as well as spouse and dependent life insurance coverages. Additional life insurance coverage information can be found at <http://www.hr.pitt.edu/benefits/Insurance.htm>

As non-employees, the value of the Postdoctoral Scholars' University-paid life insurance is subject to IRS reporting as imputed income.

Tuition Scholarships

Postdoctoral Associates and Postdoctoral Scholars and their families are eligible to participate in the University's tuition scholarship program. As is the case for faculty and staff, the value of tuition scholarships is subject to IRS reporting as imputed income. (Information on this program is available online at: <http://www.pitt.edu/HOME/PP/policies/07/07-11-01.html>).

APPENDIX

Suggested Good Practices for Postdoctoral Associates and Postdoctoral Scholars

Content of the Letter of Appointment

This letter of appointment is an ideal opportunity for the faculty mentor to outline the scope of the anticipated research project, commitment to the professional development of the PDA/PDS, and other relevant policies, such as discussions of authorship, travel to national meetings, and use of resources for professional development training. In turn, the PDA/PDS should utilize the appointment letter as a basis for discussion with the faculty mentor regarding training goals, specific training needs, long-term career goals and other components of an effective, individual development plan³. If teaching responsibilities are envisaged, these duties should also be included in the letter of appointment.

Responsibilities of the Faculty Mentor and PDA/PDS

Faculty Mentor: Moving a junior scientist and/or scholar toward an independent, productive and satisfying career is the goal of postdoctoral training for which the faculty mentor has the responsibility of providing a postdoctoral training experience which will foster the individual's intellectual, technical and professional development. The responsibility of the faculty mentor should include regular meetings to provide feedback and advice on the PDA/PDS research and scholarship, such as review of research results, identification of alternative resources and approaches, etc., and discussion of career advancement plans and strategies, such as plans for presentation of research results at national professional meetings. The faculty mentor should provide opportunities for the individual to advance by enabling his/her participation in laboratory, department and University-based professional development opportunities; the faculty mentor should ensure that the PDA/PDS attends seminars and presents research seminars, has opportunities to gain experience in teaching, and develops oral and written communication skills, such as public speaking, manuscript preparation and grant-writing. It is the faculty mentor's obligation to provide an environment of scientific and scholarly inquiry that enables the PDA/PDS to participate in research decisions, permits independent exploration of ideas, and provides full credit for his/her creative and scholarly work. The faculty mentor also has the obligation to provide fair counsel and advice to assist the PDA/PDS in moving to a subsequent career position.

Annual performance evaluations should be conducted by the faculty mentor for each PDA/PDS, and a statement of objectives for the ensuing year should be jointly developed by the individual and the faculty mentor. This performance evaluation should be conducted according to departmental and school policies.

The obligations of mentorship can be best met by frank and open discussions of expectations, goals and policies at the beginning of the training period. In this regard, the letter of appointment provided by the faculty mentor should "set the stage" for the responsibilities listed above, expectations that may be unique to a given laboratory or research setting, and should provide indications of the processes for annual review, renewal decisions (reappointment), and salary adjustments based on performance.

PDA/PDS shall not be exploited or their research and scholarship training compromised in the service of sponsored research or the financial gain of the faculty mentor. Employment by companies in which the faculty mentor has an economic interest must be disclosed in the University Conflict of Interest Policy Disclosure Form (Part II) by the faculty mentor (see University Policy 11-01-03, *Conflict of Interest – Research/Teaching* at: <http://www.pitt.edu/HOME/PP/policies/11/11-01-03.html>). All

necessary precautions must be taken to ensure that the individual's progress and professional standing are not jeopardized by violations of any professional norms in projects in which they participate under the supervision of the faculty mentor. The PDA/PDS should be informed of circumstances surrounding industry-sponsored research (i.e., publication restrictions) in advance by the faculty mentor.

Postdoctoral Associate/Postdoctoral Scholar: The PDA/PDS has full responsibility for actuating his/her postdoctoral training and should carefully investigate the details of the position, including the expected responsibilities, opportunities for professional development, and the expected nature and quality of mentorship to be provided by the faculty mentor. The individual is responsible for meeting the obligations and expectations provided in the letter of appointment and in initial discussions with the faculty mentor, including demonstration of ethical standards, maintaining good laboratory practices, engaging in collegial conduct with his/her mentor and coworkers, and meeting additional obligations or activities as stated in the letter of appointment (i.e., teaching, grant writing, training laboratory members). A PDA/PDS must adhere to all University policies regarding research conduct.

The PDA/PDS should meet on a regular basis with the faculty mentor to receive feedback and guidance on research and scholarship and to discuss career advancement plans and strategies. Regular and open communication is the best means of ensuring that the postdoctoral training period is productive and meets the goals of the individual and the faculty mentor. Ultimately, the PDA/PDS is responsible for his/her own professional development and progress toward an independent, productive and satisfying career.

In the event that it becomes necessary for a PDA/PDS to resign his or her position, it is expected that timely notification be provided to the faculty mentor so that a reasonable transition arrangement can be entered into.

Notes

1. Association of American Universities, Committee on Postdoctoral Education, Report and Recommendations, March 31, 1998.
2. This assumes that the faculty mentor and the principal investigator are one and the same individual; if not, the principal investigator should sign the letter of appointment and the faculty mentor should be clearly identified in the letter.
3. Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology, Science Policy Committee, Individual Development Plan for Postdoctoral Fellows, September 1, 2002. (This document can be found online at <http://www.faseb.org>.)