

# Postdoctoral Scholar Policy

UT Southwestern Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences

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# Postdoctoral Scholar Policy

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## I. Policy

UT Southwestern recognizes the essential role that postdoctoral training plays not only in developing scientists of the future, but also in carrying out our research today. The University encourages standardization of the selection and appointment processes for postdoctoral scholars, clear delineation of the responsibilities of postdoctoral scholars and postdoctoral mentors, and fair, efficient and equitable solutions for problems arising out of the training relationship. The Postdoctoral Affairs Office under the aegis of the Dean of the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences will assist in the career development of the postdoctoral appointee by developing curriculum, providing advocacy and guidance, and implementing and enforcing policy. The Postdoctoral Advisory Committee aids the Dean in development, revision and implementation of policies concerning postdoctoral training at UT Southwestern and in mediating disputes.

## II. Definitions

The following definitions apply to this policy:

A. "Postdoctoral Scholar" a postdoctoral appointment is conferred upon an individual who has recently been awarded a Ph.D. or equivalent doctorate in an appropriate field and who will be involved in full-time research and scholarship. The purpose of this appointment is to prepare the individual for a career as an academic or research scientist or other position requiring advanced knowledge and training in a scientific discipline. The postdoctoral appointee is supervised by a senior scholar, and the appointee has the freedom, and is expected, to publish the results of his/her research during the period of the appointment. This definition of the postdoctoral research scholar closely follows recommendations from the American Association of Medical Colleges. Time in postdoctoral training at UT Southwestern, combined with that from other institutions, is limited to six years.

The category of "Postgraduate Trainee" has been created for a foreign M.D. (or other terminal degree that required less than 8 years of education beyond high school) that has less than two years of postgraduate research experience. Appointment to this category is limited to two years. As soon as someone in this category accrues a total of two years of research training, he/she must be moved to a postdoctoral title. Once in the postdoctoral scholar category, the appointee is eligible for a maximum of another six years of training.

B. "Postdoctoral Mentor": a UT Southwestern faculty member who has earned a Ph.D., M.D., or equivalent doctoral degree and who agrees to fund, supervise, and train a Postdoctoral Scholar in the performance of research in a specialty area. Specific responsibilities of the Postdoctoral Mentor are listed in [Appendix A](#).

## III. Position Requirements

Eligibility for a Postdoctoral Scholar position at UT Southwestern requires a recently awarded Ph.D., M.D. (requiring a minimum of 8 years post high school), or equivalent advanced degree. Exceptions will be considered by the Dean of the Graduate School on a case-by-case basis. To make an appointment to a postdoctoral title, the department/center must have on file, an official transcript verifying doctoral degree, original diploma with seal that has been copied by the department/center, OR a letter from the dean of the awarding institution stating that all requirements of the degree have been met and when the diploma is expected to be awarded.

A postdoctoral title is not appropriate for a visiting or junior faculty member or a classified employee. Use of a Postdoctoral Scholar title is also inappropriate for appointing anyone on a trial basis for another title. A clinical fellow title should be used to appoint an M.D. who is conducting research but is in (or aspiring to) a residency or fellowship program. Prior approval must be requested from the Office of Graduate Medical Education for appointment to clinical fellow titles.

#### **IV. Guidelines for Advertisement of Postdoctoral Scholar Positions**

Advertisements to be placed in scientific journals/publications and/or on web sites must first be approved by the Department Chair's or Center Director's office before being sent to the Office of the Dean of the Graduate School for final approval. Further detailed guidelines are available from the Postdoctoral Affairs Office ([Appendix B](#)).

#### **V. Appointment as a Postdoctoral Scholar**

##### **A. Appointment Letter**

A formal appointment ("Appointment Letter") as a Postdoctoral Scholar must be completed before a Postdoctoral Scholar can assume duties at UT Southwestern. The Appointment Letter shall contain:

- a statement of the basic terms of appointment, including the period of appointment (inclusive dates),
- the stipend or salary (conforming to the Departmental or Center pay plan, see section D below),
- all included benefits
- a statement that the appointment is subject to all University policies.

The Appointment Letter ([Appendix C](#)) must conform to the template approved by the Graduate School and be reviewed by the Department Chair/Center Director before offering to the Postdoctoral Scholar applicant. The Postdoctoral Scholar applicant must return a signed copy of the Appointment Letter acknowledging acceptance of the appointment and receipt of copies of University policies prior to commencement of the appointment. A copy of the signed Appointment Letter as well as other documents necessary to the appointment shall be kept in the office of the appropriate Department or Center.

If the term of appointment is extended more than six months, this extension should be offered in writing ("Amended Appointment Letter") and the Postdoctoral Scholar should return a signed copy of the Amended Appointment Letter acknowledging acceptance of the extended appointment prior to commencement of the extension period. An Amended Appointment Letter shall be in the same form as the Appointment Letter but bearing the designation "Amended Appointment Letter." A copy of the signed Amended Appointment Letter as well as other documents necessary to the extended appointment shall be kept in the office of the appropriate Department or Center. The procedures for appointing a Postdoctoral Scholar at UT Southwestern are specified in a document titled "*Departmental Checklist for Postdoctoral Scholar Appointment*" ([Appendix D](#)).

##### **B. Categories of Postdoctoral Appointments**

The categories of postdoctoral appointment are described below. For all categories, the department must obtain and keep on file, an official transcript verifying doctoral degree, an original diploma with seal that has been copied by the department, or a letter from the dean of the awarding institution stating that all requirements of the degree have been met and when the diploma is expected to be awarded. Appointees to the 0800 series of job codes are paid a salary and thus receive all benefits afforded to employees; they are subject to Federal Income and FICA (Social Security) tax withholding and have a choice of Teacher Retirement System or Optional Retirement Program. Appointees to the PRF series of fellow titles receive a stipend, are not

considered employees, and thus receive fewer benefits; in lieu of benefits they shall be provided a supplement ([Appendix E](#)). Stipends are not subject to withholding of taxes.

**1. Postdoctoral Researcher II (job code 0804) or Postdoctoral Research Fellow II (PRF II):**

This category includes those with qualifications equivalent to a Ph.D. degree granted by an institution in the United States. To be considered a Postdoctoral Researcher/Fellow, the applicant must have obtained a Ph.D. degree, or have completed eight years of academic work beyond high school and obtained a doctoral degree.

**2. Postdoctoral Research Fellow II – Howard Hughes (PRH II)**

This category includes only those who have appointments paid directly through Howard Hughes Medical Institute. Fellows only; there is no budget/payroll code for this title.

**3. Postgraduate Trainee (job code 0805 or PGT)**

This category includes those applicants who do not have the educational equivalent of a U.S. Ph.D. degree. Scholars in this category may have a foreign M.D. degree or a foreign terminal degree which required less than 8 years of education beyond high school, and less than two years of postgraduate research experience. As soon as someone in this category accrues a total of two years of research experience she/he must be moved to a Postdoctoral Researcher/Fellow title. Once in the Postdoctoral Researcher/Fellow category, the scholar is eligible for a maximum of six years of training.

**C. Pay**

Base salaries for Postdoctoral Scholars are set by the Dean of the Graduate School. The annual pay scales as of September 2010 are:

<u>Postgraduate Trainee</u>		<u>Postdoctoral Researcher II</u>	
0-1 yr	\$ 35,000	0-1 yr	\$ 37,740
1-2 yrs	\$ 36,000	1-2 yrs	\$ 39,756
		2-3 yrs	\$ 42,624
		3-4 yrs	\$ 44,304
		4-5 yrs	\$ 45,960
		5-6 yrs	\$ 47,940

**D. Pay Plans**

To comply with federal law related to sponsorship of H-1B visas, each department and center at UT Southwestern establishes and follows a pay plan to ensure equitable remuneration to Postdoctoral Scholars. The Graduate School strongly encourages departments and centers to share their pay plans with their Postdoctoral Scholars.

1. Variances in remuneration must be based on specified and objective criteria. Deviations from pay plans could result in the loss of the institution's authority to issue H-1B visas. Common variances include stipulating a bonus for postdoctoral scholars who garner competitive fellowship funding and adjusting pay to be commensurate with that stipulated by a fellowship if it is higher than that stipulated in section C above. See appendix E for pay plan template.
2. Postdoctoral Scholars paid a stipend receive fewer benefits than those paid salaries as employees. Therefore, mentors or the department must provide a supplement to substitute for the non-insurance benefits received by scholars appointed as employees. The supplement is set by the dean and is \$4000 annually ([Appendix E](#)). Details are available from the Postdoctoral Affairs Office.

**E. Medical Insurance**

Postdoctoral Scholars will be provided with medical insurance while at UT Southwestern.

Postdoctoral scholars paid by stipend (those appointed to job codes PGT or PRFII) must have the cost equal to the premium-sharing amount paid for their medical insurance coverage. If a postdoctoral scholar's pay is moved from a budget source (fringe benefits provided) to a stipend source (fringe benefits not provided), the insurance cost and the \$4000 non-employee fellow supplement must be covered by the Postdoctoral Mentor or the department.

If the \$4000 supplement paid from a budgeted source is less than the amount the subscriber needs to pay for the insurance coverage selected, there are two options:

- 1) The mentor/department may pay the postdoctoral scholar an additional amount from a budgeted source to bring the pay up to the amount needed. In this case, the department may justify that the postdoctoral scholar is not paid according to the pay plan by stating that the scholar is "being paid according to the fellowship".
- 2) The mentor/department may choose not to provide additional pay and thus the postdoctoral scholar would need to purchase external insurance. The International Office can recommend sources of external insurance. Most external policies require the primary visa-holder to be covered.

#### F. Leave – Vacation and Sick

All Postdoctoral Scholars are entitled to vacation and sick leave. Such leave should be monitored and administered by the department/center and should be consistent with standard university accruals.

#### G. Leave of Absence

If a situation arises in which a Postdoctoral Scholar must set aside training for a period of time, an unpaid leave of absence (LOA) may be appropriate. Note that visa status may be affected by LOA; thus the International Office should be contacted prior to initiating a request for LOA. Leave may be granted for up to one year at a time. If additional time is needed, and additional request must be approved. An LOA request is initiated by the Postdoctoral Scholar and approved by the Postdoctoral Mentor, the department chair/center director, and the Dean of the Graduate School. Letters of request should include the justification for granting leave and the amount of time the Scholar expects to be away.

#### H. Additional Benefits

Appointment as a postdoctoral scholar affords access to student services including [health, mental health](#), lowest campus [parking](#) fees, and assistance with [career development](#).

#### I. Term Limit

1. The term of postdoctoral research training is to be limited to six years including postdoctoral training received at other institutions, either inside or outside the U.S. Significantly shorter periods of training may be more suitable in many cases. An extension may be granted under exceptional circumstances with the written approval of the Department Chair/Center Director and the Dean. After this term has expired, the Postdoctoral Scholar is expected to pursue an independent career.

2. Options for continuing appointment at UT Southwestern beyond the six-year postdoctoral training period include applying for a faculty position or a classified position such as Research Scientist. Please note that the International Office must be contacted prior to offering permanent positions to persons on non-immigrant visas.

#### J. Part-time

Part-time Postdoctoral Scholar appointments may be approved with prior justification. The six year limit to postdoctoral training may not be exceeded due to part-time appointment without prior approval of the Department Chair/Center Director and the Dean. Full time Postdoctoral Scholar appointments may not be changed to part-time without justification and prior approval of the Department Chair/Center Director and the Dean.

## K. Additional Employment

Postdoctoral Scholars are not allowed to have additional employment.

## VI. The Relationship between Postdoctoral Scholar and Postdoctoral Mentor

The Graduate School endorses the AAMC Compact Between Postdoctoral Appointees and Their Mentors: <http://www.aamc.org/research/postdoccompact/>. Because postdoctoral training is under the aegis of the Graduate School, questions and concerns regarding the actions and behavior of Postdoctoral Scholars should be directed to the Postdoctoral Affairs Office rather than to Human Resources.

### A. Responsibilities of the Postdoctoral Scholar

Postdoctoral training presupposes that the Postdoctoral Scholar is capable of independently executing original research under the guidance of the Postdoctoral Mentor. The Postdoctoral Scholar is responsible for the ethical and conscientious conduct of his/her research and adherence to good laboratory practice. This includes, but is not limited to, the maintenance of adequate research records and compliance with all regulations. The Postdoctoral Scholar is responsible for open and timely discussion with the Postdoctoral Mentor of research findings and must notify the Postdoctoral Mentor prior to obtaining or distributing materials that either belong to their laboratory or are acquired under the auspices of their laboratory. Postdoctoral Scholars are expected to follow both the UT System and UT Southwestern Ethics Policy (Regents' Rules and Regulations, Series 30103; Section 2.2 of the [Handbook of Operating Procedures](#)); the Technology Development and Intellectual Property Management Policy (Regents' Rules and Regulations Series 90101; Section 2.12 of the Handbook of Operating Procedures) and the Misconduct/Fraud in Research Policy (Section 2.13 of the Handbook of Operating Procedures). Postdoctoral Scholars are required to register in the Graduate School and participate in the [Postdoctoral Certificate Training Program](#).

### B. Responsibilities of the Postdoctoral Mentor

The Postdoctoral Mentor is responsible for providing an environment in which advanced training in a research specialty can be conducted. The Postdoctoral Mentor is responsible for providing guidance for the professional development of the Postdoctoral Scholar. The Postdoctoral Mentor is responsible for ensuring an equitable apportionment of credit for research accomplished by the Postdoctoral Scholar, including but not limited to research publications and patent applications, as appropriate. The Postdoctoral Mentor is expected to follow both the UT System and UT Southwestern Ethics Policy (Regents' Rules and Regulations, Series 30103; Section 2.2 of the Handbook of Operating Procedures); the Technology Development and Intellectual Property Management Policy (Regents' Rules and Regulations Series 90101; Section 2.12 of the Handbook of Operating Procedures) and the Misconduct/Fraud in Research Policy (Section 2.13 of the Handbook of Operating Procedures). Specific responsibilities of the postdoctoral mentor related to the postdoctoral training program are listed in [Appendix A](#).

## VII. Requirement for Written Three-month Review

At the completion of the first three months of appointment, the Postdoctoral Mentor shall provide the Postdoctoral Scholar with a written evaluation that documents research project goals and any need for scholar improvement (utilizing the [form](#) available on-line and from the Postdoctoral Affairs Office). A copy of this evaluation, signed by both the Postdoctoral Mentor and Postdoctoral Scholar, shall be placed on file in the office of the appropriate Department or Center. Further progress review shall be in the form of Postdoctoral Scholar-initiated Individual Development Plan, including feedback from the Postdoctoral Mentor, as described under Section VIII below.

## VIII. Certificate Training Program for Postdoctoral Scholars

### A. Certificate Program

All Postdoctoral Scholars register in a certificate program that is comprised of multiple certificates, each of which is intended to be completed in two years' time. This includes Postdoctoral Scholars paid directly from sources other than the UT Southwestern (such as Howard Hughes Medical Institute, Presbyterian Hospital, and governments of foreign countries). Postdoctoral scholars new to UT Southwestern are required to attend an introductory presentation on the postdoctoral training program given monthly by Postdoctoral Affairs Office. Postdoctoral Scholars register for three credit hours of coursework in the Fall and Spring terms and two credit hours of coursework in the Summer term. The training program is organized along the lines of continuing professional training and is graded on a pass/fail system. Certificates are offered in a variety of tracks, each of which includes required coursework; all Scholars begin with the Certificate in Research. Electives are offered as selected advanced graduate courses from the class offerings of the Division of Biological Sciences, as supervised research, and as other activities. A certificate shall be awarded upon completion of 15 credit hours of training (including required courses with passing grades) at which time a continuing Postdoctoral Scholar shall choose among multiple advanced certificates to register. A Postdoctoral Scholar shall be subject to dismissal or reclassification out of a postdoctoral title if he/she fails to complete a certificate in two years' time. Exceptions to the two year certificate completion may be granted by the Dean.

### B. Services for Registered Postdoctoral Scholars

The Postdoctoral Training Program affords access for registered Postdoctoral Scholars to student services including fitness and recreation participation opportunities at the Bryan Williams, M.D. [Student Center](#), computer software, and technical assistance for personal computers.

## IX. Guidelines for Ending Postdoctoral Scholar Appointments

### A. Dismissal with Three Months Notice

Most often, a Postdoctoral Scholar may be dismissed with written notice at least three months prior to the dismissal date. Notice shall consist of a dated letter advising the Postdoctoral Scholar that his/her appointment will end three months or more from the date of the dismissal letter ("Dismissal Letter", [Appendix F](#)); under this simple, routine process, justification shall not be included in the notice). A copy of the Dismissal Letter shall be kept in the permanent file of the Postdoctoral Scholar in the appropriate Departmental or Center office and a copy shall be forwarded to the Office of the Dean. Note that the Reduction in Force procedure does not apply to Postdoctoral Scholars as they are not permanent employees.

### B. Dismissal for Violation of Standards of Conduct

Under unusual circumstances, it may be necessary to dismiss a Postdoctoral Scholar for violating conduct standards. Any Postdoctoral Scholar who engages in behavior that violates the required standards of conduct as listed in Chapter 3, Section 3.3.2 of the [Handbook of Operating Procedures](#) will be subject to disciplinary action up to and including dismissal. Procedures for implementing disciplinary action shall be followed as outlined in Section 3.3.2 of the [Handbook of Operating Procedures](#). Misrepresentation of degree status to gain appointment is grounds for dismissal.

## X. Grievances

### A. Scope

A Postdoctoral Scholar may submit a grievance complaining of actions that are within the scope of the Postdoctoral Mentor- Postdoctoral Scholar relationship and that (1) alter the terms of appointment stated in the Appointment Letter or (2) alter conditions of appointment, including wages, duties, job assignments, the interpretation or application of policy, or improper dismissal. Complaints regarding scientific misconduct, conflict of interest, program termination, discrimination or sexual harassment are not covered by the Postdoctoral Scholar Grievance Policy. Postdoctoral Scholars may file such complaints by following the policies and procedures for these types of grievances as set forth in the UT Southwestern [Handbook of Operating Procedures](#).

### B. Grievance Procedure

#### 1. Informal Grievance

The Postdoctoral Scholar should first attempt to resolve the issue with his/her Postdoctoral Mentor. If this attempt is unsuccessful, or if the Postdoctoral Scholar feels that this is not possible, the Postdoctoral Scholar may consult a member of the Postdoctoral Advisory Committee. One purpose of the Postdoctoral Advisory Committee is to give the Postdoctoral Scholar objective advice about the consequences of various courses of action and to serve as mediators to facilitate communication between Postdoctoral Scholars and their Postdoctoral Mentors. The names, titles, and departmental affiliations of [Postdoctoral Advisory Committee](#) members are available on-line.

#### 2. Written Grievance

If the grievance is not satisfactorily resolved at the Informal Grievance stage, the Postdoctoral Scholar may present the grievance in writing to the Department Chair or Center Director, within ten working days of the incident that forms the basis of the grievance. In the event the subject of the grievance is the Department Chair or Center Director, the Postdoctoral Scholar should proceed to the appeal process (item 3 below). The grievance shall be in the form of a letter that clearly describes the incident and explains why this constitutes a breach of the Postdoctoral Scholar / Postdoctoral Mentor relationship.

The Chairperson or Director shall acknowledge in writing the receipt of the grievance within ten working days. She/He will review the substance of the grievance, including relevant documents presented by the Postdoctoral Scholar, and will review input from the Postdoctoral Mentor and any other persons with knowledge of the incident. All documents given to the Chairperson or Director will be, to the extent authorized by law, confidential and will be held by the Chairperson or Director. The Chairperson or Director may meet with the Postdoctoral Scholar and Postdoctoral Mentor at her/his discretion and will provide them with a written decision for resolving the matter within ten working days of receiving the grievance. Where possible, the Chairperson or Director should meet with both the Postdoctoral Mentor and Postdoctoral Scholar together and broker a frank discussion of the facts of the dispute.

#### 3. Appeal

If the Postdoctoral Scholar is not satisfied with the decision of the Chairperson or Center Director, if the grievance is not dealt with in a timely manner by the Chairperson or Center Director, or if the subject of the grievance is a Department Chairperson or Center Director, the Postdoctoral Scholar may submit a written grievance to the Dean of the Graduate School. If this grievance is an appeal of the decision of a Chairperson or Center Director, it should be made within ten working days of the receipt of the Chairperson's or Center Director's decision by the Scholar. The appeal must include a copy of the decision of the Chairperson or Center Director and a statement establishing the basis for the Postdoctoral Scholar's disagreement with the Chairperson's or Center Director's decision. If the grievance is being submitted directly to the Dean, it should satisfy the requirements

of a grievance submitted to a Chairperson or Center Director, as described in Formal Step 1. The Dean may review the grievance and issue a decision or may select members of the Postdoctoral Advisory Committee to review the grievance. Within ten working days of receiving the grievance, the Postdoctoral Scholar will be notified in writing either of the Dean's decision or that an investigatory Postdoctoral Advisory Subcommittee has been convened.

The Postdoctoral Advisory Subcommittee will review the substance of the grievance, including relevant documents presented by the Postdoctoral Scholar, Chairperson/Center Director and Postdoctoral Mentor. The Postdoctoral Advisory Subcommittee may request additional information or meet with either or both parties as deemed necessary. Any such meeting will be held within ten working days of the date the Subcommittee was informed of the grievance. The Subcommittee will issue a written recommendation to the Dean of the Graduate School no later than ten working days of the receipt of the grievance by the subcommittee. The Dean of the Graduate School will issue a written decision for the resolution of the grievance within ten working days of receipt of this recommendation. The decision of the Dean of Southwestern Graduate School is final and unappealable.

### **Appendices**

- A. [Specific Responsibilities of Faculty Mentors for the Postdoctoral Training Program](#)
- B. [Policy/Guidelines for Advertisement of Postdoctoral Research Scholar Positions](#)
- C. [Appointment Letter for Postdoctoral Scholars](#)
- D. [Departmental Checklist for Postdoctoral Scholar Appointment](#)
- E. [Supplement to Postdoctoral Stipends](#)
- F. [Dismissal Letter for Postdoctoral Scholars](#)