

George Mason University

Postdoctoral Research Fellows Policy

I. Background

As part of its mission to promote research activities of the highest quality and the training of qualified faculty members, George Mason University encourages Postdoctoral Research Fellows to work with experienced faculty researchers on projects that benefit the Postdoctoral Research Fellow and the university. It is the expectation of the faculty researcher to advise and train the Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the research content and methodology. In addition the faculty researcher will serve as a mentor in the standards and protocols of the profession. The commitment of the Postdoctoral Research Fellow and the faculty member to their mutual goals forms the basis for an effective learning experience for the Postdoctoral Research Fellow and helps to further the research agenda of the faculty researcher.

II. Requirements

Postdoctoral Research Fellows must have earned a doctoral degree or its equivalent and have received advanced training in research and/or professional practice at a University under the supervision and aegis of one of the University's departments or centers and its faculty. Employment of a Postdoctoral Fellow is governed by this policy. Postdoctoral Fellows are not faculty members and are not governed by the Faculty Handbook.

III. Expectations of Postdoctoral Research Fellow

The University has adopted the following universal set of performance expectations for Postdoctoral Research Fellows:

- Conscientious discharge of assigned duties
- Adherence to ethical standards
- Compliance with established disciplinary research and teaching standards
- Compliance with established university policies and guidelines for research involving biohazards, human subjects, animals, intellectual property, conflicts of interest and other research policies and procedures
- Participation in Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) training
- Open and timely discussion with the mentor regarding research expectations and progress
- Distribution of materials, or any disclosure of findings or techniques privately or in publications to the Principal Investigator and to the appropriate university unit, e.g., Office of Technology Transfer
- Maintenance of accurate records of all research, and transfer of research records to the Principal Investigator upon completion of his/her research program at Mason
- Membership and participation in appropriate professional organizations
- Compliance with all applicable University policies and procedures

IV. Expectations of Faculty Research (Mentor)

Each Postdoctoral Research Fellow must have an assigned faculty mentor and supervisor. The mentor shall supervise the agreed upon projects and provide annual evaluations of the Postdoctoral Research Fellow. Any changes in either mentor or projects must be made in writing, approved by the Department Chair, Dean, or Institute Director, and a copy placed in the personnel file. The mentor will assist the Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the development of a Postdoctoral Plan. This plan will delineate the goals and objectives of the Postdoctoral Research Fellow during his/her appointment, such as research aims and grant writing aspirations. The plan may be used as a basis for evaluation.

V. Evaluation

The mentor must complete an annual written performance evaluation following his/her unit's procedures. The evaluation process must include the opportunity for the Postdoctoral Research Fellow to respond in writing to the evaluation. Copies of the evaluations shall be provided to the Postdoctoral Research Fellow and a copy placed in the personnel file (along with any response from the Postdoctoral Research Fellow).

VI. Administration

The home department, Office of the Provost, and Human Resources and Payroll will be responsible for maintaining data and files on each Postdoctoral Research Fellow. The files shall include a copy of the Postdoctoral Research Fellow hiring packet, a copy of the annual evaluations, and any other information that would be considered relevant to the appointment. The Office of the Provost will maintain a copy of the highest degree transcript. Original transcripts will be housed at the home department.

VII. Financial Support for Postdoctoral Research Fellowships

In most cases the salary for a Postdoctoral Research Fellow should conform to the market expectations for the discipline. If inconsistent with the current market expectations, the salary must be adequately justified in writing by the Faculty Mentor and/or Principal Investigator. In no case shall the salary be lower than the standard established by the Fair Labor Standards Act.

The Postdoctoral Fellow will be paid according to the terms of his/her contract.

VIII. Terms of Appointment

The Postdoctoral Research Fellow shall be appointed in one year renewable terms, up to a maximum of five one-year terms. The University is committed to the fulfillment of the terms of the contract.

IX. Appointment Offer

Each Postdoctoral Research Fellow Appointment offer shall be made in writing to the Postdoctoral Research Fellow by letter, which shall be signed by the Department Chair, Dean, or Institute Director. A description of the process, checklist and offer letter template is located on the Provost website. The hiring department must obtain final administrative approval for the Postdoctoral Research Fellow hiring packet, prior to hiring, from the Office of the Provost and the Office of Equity and Diversity Services.

X. Visa Sponsorship

Postdoctoral Research Fellows coming to the U.S. from overseas, or currently in the U.S. in non-immigrant status, are subject to all immigration laws and regulations of the United States, including regulations of the Department of Homeland Security. The Office of International Programs and Services (OIPS) will assist the sponsoring department with the visa issues related to the fellow's appointment.

To request visa documents, the sponsoring department submits a written request with the appropriate supporting documentation to OIPS. Such requests should be made as early as possible, but no later than ninety days prior to the expected arrival date of the Postdoctoral Research Fellow. International Postdoctoral Research Fellows typically hold J-1 Exchange Visitor status. If questions arise about what non-immigrant status is appropriate, a decision will be made by OIPS following a review of the Postdoctoral Research Fellow's visa history and the program information provided by the sponsoring department.

Postdoctoral Research Fellows will not be eligible for University sponsorship of permanent residency.

XI. Benefits and Annual Leave

Postdoctoral Research Fellows will be eligible for benefits and paid leave in accordance with University Policy. If the fund source specifies annual or sick leave terms, the funding source shall govern the amount of leave awarded. If the funding source does not specify, university policy applies. Postdoctoral Research Fellows are entitled to University holidays. Postdoctoral Research Fellows shall not receive any leave payout at separation. For further questions please contact the Human Resources and Payroll department.

XII. Resignation and Termination

In general, it is expected that a Postdoctoral Research Fellow will seek employment outside the University at the completion of the appointment. A Postdoctoral Research Fellow may be granted a subsequent appointment to a fixed term position only if hired through the standard, competitive recruitment and hiring process, meets the requirements of the position, and is selected as the best qualified.

Resignation: It is expected that at least one month's notice will be provided when a Postdoctoral Research Fellow decides to resign prior to the end of the term indicated in the offer letter.

Termination without Cause: A Postdoctoral Research Fellow may also have his/her appointment ended at any time for any other reasons upon ninety (90) days written notice. Such termination must be approved by the Chair, Dean or Institute Director.

Termination for Cause: Upon written notice a Postdoctoral Research Fellow may have his/her appointment immediately terminated at any time if he/she is found to have violated any obligations specified in this policy. Such violations include, but are not limited to, egregious actions, such as destruction of experiments, 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. The Unit should work with and notify the Employee Relations Director regarding termination of appointment for cause.

Upon leaving, a Postdoctoral Research Fellow must leave all original notebooks, data, reagents and any other study components or university property with the mentor in a state that will allow uninterrupted continuation of the research and ensure compliance with university policies. The Postdoctoral Research Fellow may make copies of his/her laboratory notebooks and/or computer files.