

Guidelines for Postdoctoral Appointments
Office of the Provost
The University of Texas at El Paso
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PURPOSE

Postdoctoral appointments provide recent graduates of doctoral programs with opportunities to further their development as teachers, researchers, and scholars working under the supervision and mentorship of a senior faculty scholar. Through their work, postdoctoral appointees (referred to herein as “postdocs”) contribute significantly to the University research enterprise and teaching mission. They also provide research direction to both undergraduate and graduate students and may support teaching and other program areas. UTEP postdocs have Administrative and Professional (“A &P”) Staff appointments. They are paid through the University and are eligible for standard employee benefits. Compensation and benefits for postdocs may be supported with internal or external funds.

DEFINITIONS

National standards related to postdoctoral appointments were defined in the 1998 *“Report and Recommendations”* of the Association of American Universities Committee on Postdoctoral Education¹. Accordingly, UTEP postdoctoral appointments share the following standards and characteristics:

- the appointee was recently awarded a Ph.D. or equivalent doctorate (e.g., Ed.D., Sc.D., M.D., or D.V.M.) in an appropriate field;
- the appointment involves substantially full-time teaching, research, or scholarship;
- the appointment is a transitional position viewed as preparatory for an academic and/or research career;
- appointments under a clinical training program will adhere to the standards of their respective professional fields;
- the appointee works under the supervision of a faculty member and/or staff; and
- the appointee has the freedom and is expected to publish the results of his/her research during the period of appointment.

RECRUITMENT GUIDELINES

UTEP postdocs will be recruited, appointed, non-renewed, and terminated utilizing the procedures followed for A & P employees, in addition to any requirements prescribed by the funding source. These are outlined in Section V - Human Resources of the University Handbook of Operating Procedures: <http://admin.utep.edu/Default.aspx?tabid=30199> .

The hiring individual or department will secure permission to recruit and hire the postdoc through standard procedures, including approval from the appropriate Department Chair/Director, Dean, and if required, the Office of Research and Sponsored Projects (ORSP). The position request shall then be submitted to the Office of Human Resources per standard procedures.

All postdoctoral job postings must include clear expectations of the position and requirements associated with the program. A disclaimer indicating pending grant award and/or timeframe will be included both in job postings and job descriptions provided to prospective employees.

The Office of Human Resources must be provided the name of the selected candidate prior to extending an offer to ensure that applicable procedures have been and will continue to be followed.

APPOINTMENT GUIDELINES

Following approval by the Department Chair and Dean (or equivalent University officials) and Office of Human Resources, the postdoc will receive a formal letter of appointment from the hiring department specifying the following:

- Title of the position
- Salary
- Fringe benefits,
- General duties and expectations, per the job description
- Name and position of the respective supervisor
- Scope of anticipated research project and role of the postdoc, including goals, timeframes, deadlines, and expectations associated with projects and research
- Link to, or copy of, these guidelines for informational purposes
- Anticipated term of continuing appointment. (This will typically be for a period of one to two (1-2) years, but may not exceed four (4) years. The letter of appointment must also state that the continuing appointment is contingent upon meeting performance expectations.)
- Other provisions, if necessary

If the position is grant funded, the letter of appointment should include the following language:

- This position is grant funded and continued appointment is contingent on availability of funds and meeting performance expectations.

Initial postdoctoral appointments will be effective for the period specified in the formal letter of appointment, but generally may not exceed a term of four (4) years. The letter of appointment will be jointly signed by the Faculty Mentor/Principal Investigator ² (PI), the Department Chair (or equivalent University official) and the postdoctoral appointee. The postdoc's signature and acceptance of the appointment letter reflects the postdoc's understanding and agreement with regard to the terms, conditions and limitations of the appointment.

Appointing units must confer with the Office of Human Resources to ensure that UTEP postdocs are hired under the correct job code.

Salary levels for UTEP postdocs should be consistent with regional and national salary levels in the relevant disciplines. Salary levels will typically exceed the rates paid to advanced doctoral students in the same fields.

REAPPOINTMENT / NONRENEWAL / TERMINATION GUIDELINES

Reappointment:

Reappointments require adherence to the original appointment guidelines and satisfactory job performance, as determined by the faculty supervisor. Reappointments are also subject to availability and continuation of funds. Postdoctoral appointments may be continued beyond the initial appointment term through a reappointment, but the total time spent as a postdoc may not exceed four (4) years. Exceptions to such guidelines should be granted only after careful review by the Department Chair/Center Director and the administrator responsible for postdocs (currently, the Dean of the Graduate School). Over the course of the postdoc's appointment, it is recognized that the source of funding for the appointment may change, with an associated adjustment in benefits. The faculty mentor and department should make reasonable efforts to inform the postdoc in advance of any changes affecting salary or benefits. Reappointments should be made, whenever possible, at an equal or higher salary if supported by a documented performance appraisal conducted by the faculty supervisor.

Evaluation:

At least once a year, the faculty supervisor shall work with the postdoc to develop a statement of objectives. Annual performance reviews will be conducted by the faculty supervisor based on the statement of objectives. This performance evaluation should be conducted in accordance with all departmental, college, and University policies.

Nonrenewal:

The faculty supervisor should provide the Office of Human Resources written notice of the intent to non-renew a postdoc at least ninety (90) days prior to the end of the fiscal year, or ninety (90) days prior to the end of the original appointment, whichever is earlier. Human Resources should be notified prior to the postdoc receiving notice (verbal or written). Any delay or failure to meet the advance notification deadline should be based on good cause, as determined by the University.

Termination:

Termination of appointment requires review and consultation with the Office of Human Resources, the Dean of the Graduate School, the respective Department Chair/Director, and the academic Dean, prior to informing the postdoc. Termination of a postdoc prior to the end of the appointment should be initiated only if the postdoc has received prior feedback with respect to his/her unsatisfactory performance, or if based on a violation of University policy. This provision may also apply if the funding source has been eliminated and no additional sources of funding are available. The postdoc should be informed in writing of the reasons for early termination of the appointment. Once approved by the academic Dean, the notice letter must be signed by the faculty mentor/PI and co-signed by the Department Chair. The Dean of the Graduate School must also be notified of early termination. Nothing in these guidelines should be construed to prevent termination pursuant to any policy applicable to A & P employees, as outlined in the Handbook of Operating Procedures.

IMMIGRATION STATUS

The Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) requires employers to institute procedures for verifying that a job applicant is authorized to be employed in the United States. As a condition of appointment, an applicant for a postdoctoral appointment is required to produce the necessary documentation that he/she is either a U.S. Citizen or otherwise authorized to be employed in the United States.

The Office of Human Resources (Immigration section) should be contacted for clarification and assistance if the supervisor will require assistance with visa sponsorship. Postdocs requiring visas should be provided detailed information of the visa timeframe, and no assurances of further sponsorship beyond the stated appointment period should be made. Postdocs under immigration visas are protected from unlawful discrimination pursuant to University policies, rules and regulations.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Each party to the appointment bears certain responsibilities. See the Appendix - Suggested Best Practices for Postdoctoral Appointments, for guidance regarding best practices.

Faculty Supervisor/Mentor: Moving a junior scientist and/or scholar toward an independent, productive and rewarding career is the goal of postdoctoral training. The faculty mentor is responsible for providing a postdoctoral training experience that will foster the postdoc's intellectual, technical, and professional development. The faculty supervisor is also responsible for evaluating the conduct and performance of the postdoc and communicating related expectations. Postdocs shall not be exploited, nor their research or teacher training compromised in the service of the sponsored research or the financial gain of the faculty supervisor.

Postdoctoral Appointee: The postdoc should carefully investigate the details of the position, including expectations and responsibilities, opportunities for professional development, and the expected nature and quality of mentorship to be provided by the Faculty Supervisor. The postdoc is responsible for meeting the obligations and expectations expressed in the letter of appointment and discussions with the faculty supervisor, and for adhering to all University policies regarding research conduct.

Department or Center: The department or center is responsible for oversight of the postdoctoral appointment letter and for providing an environment that supports a high-quality postdoctoral training experience. The department or center also provides oversight for annual postdoctoral performance evaluations and for decisions relating to merit, reappointment, and termination.

College or School: It is the responsibility of the college or school to support the efforts of the department to provide a high-quality postdoctoral training environment.

Graduate School: The Graduate School, in consultation with the colleges, ORSP, and Office of Human Resources, will have responsibility for the development of postdoc policies and will monitor their application, including appointment actions. The Graduate School will also provide professional development and academic and support opportunities for postdocs as appropriate. The Graduate School will have responsibility for the identification and dissemination of national best practices with regard to postdoctoral appointments.

CAMPUS WORKPLACE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

As members of the University community, postdocs must become familiar both with their work-related responsibilities and University policies contained within the Handbook of Operating Procedures.

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 conduct and integrity in research. UTEP's Research Integrity Policy contains the procedures to be followed in the event of a violation of research integrity or research misconduct. This Policy applies to all postdoctoral positions.

A postdoc should make every effort to receive training in issues regarding research protocol including training in responsible conduct, Institutional Review Board (IRB) and/or Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC), and intellectual property, including conflicts of interest. Training will be provided by ORSP, the Graduate School, the faculty mentor/PI, the respective department, the applicable college or school, and the University.

PATENT RIGHTS

Patent rights resulting from research conducted in whole or in part by a postdoc are subject to The University of Texas at El Paso's Patent Rights and Technology Transfer Policy found at www.research.utep.edu. Data collected as part of the assigned research duties of the postdoc 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/PI will give fair credit to the postdoc for his/her research and scholarly contribution.

SUGGESTED BEST PRACTICES FOR POSTDOCTORAL APPOINTMENTS

Content of the Letter of Appointment

The offer letter is an ideal opportunity for the faculty mentor to outline the scope of the anticipated research project, commitment to the professional development of the postdoctoral appointee (postdoc), and other relevant policies, such as discussions of authorship, travel to national meetings, and use of resources for professional development training. In turn, the postdoc 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 expected, these duties should also be included in the letter of appointment.

Responsibilities of the Faculty Mentor and Postdoctoral Appointee

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 training experience which will foster the individual's intellectual, technical and professional development.
- Conducting regular meetings to provide feedback and advice on research and scholarship, such as review of research results, identification of alternative resources and approaches, and discussion of career advancement plans and strategies, including plans for presentation and publication of research results to a national audience.
- Providing opportunities for the postdoc to advance by enabling his/her participation in laboratory, department and University-based professional development opportunities.
- Ensuring the postdoc 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.
- Providing an environment of scientific and scholarly inquiry that enables the postdoc to participate in research decisions, permits independent exploration of ideas, and provides full credit for the postdoc's creative and scholarly work.
- Providing sound guidance and advice to assist the postdoc in his/her professional advancement.
- Drawing on the responsibilities outlined in the offer letter and in consultation with the postdoc, the mentor will prepare a clear set of written expectations and a timetable for completion.
- Collaborating with the postdoc to create a career development plan that outlines the key goals of the postdoctoral appointment and plans for subsequent career objectives.
- Engaging in a periodic review of the progress of the postdoc and discussing any concerns with the postdoc. Evaluations should take place at least annually. In the postdoc's first year, an evaluation should take place by the end of the first six (6) months.

The postdoc will have the opportunity to respond, in writing, to address any concerns that have been indicated in the mentor's written evaluation. There should be a clear timetable indicated for the postdoc to address any concerns.

Performance reviews should be conducted by the faculty mentor for each postdoc on at least an annual basis, and a statement of objectives for the ensuing year should be jointly developed by the postdoc and faculty mentor. Performance evaluations should be conducted in accordance with all departmental and school or college policies and University policy. 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 should thoroughly detail the postdoc's responsibilities, expectations that may be unique to a given laboratory or research setting, the process for annual review, conditions regarding renewals or reappointment, and potential salary adjustments based on performance.

Postdoctoral Appointee: The postdoc has full responsibility for actuating his/her postdoctoral training and should carefully investigate the details of the position, including 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 expressed in the letter of appointment and in initial discussions with the faculty mentor. The postdoc must also demonstrate high ethical standards, maintain sound laboratory practices, engage with colleagues in a collegial manner, and meet any other reasonable expectations of a postdoc position or as stated in the letter of appointment (e.g., teaching, grant writing, training laboratory members). A postdoc must adhere to all University policies regarding research conduct.

The postdoc should meet regularly 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 postdoc and faculty mentor. Ultimately, the postdoc is responsible for his/her own professional development and progress toward an independent, productive, and rewarding career. In the event that a postdoc makes a determination to resign from the position, the postdoc must timely inform the faculty mentor in facilitation of a reasonable transition arrangement.

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>.)