

Washington University Postdoctoral Education Policy

May 2, 2003

Preface

Washington University is committed to excellence in research and education. We recognize it is an important part of the University's educational mission to provide postdoctoral appointees with training opportunities of the highest quality. We further recognize that postdoctoral appointees make a critical contribution to the University's overall research and teaching mission through the generation of new ideas, sharing of research knowledge, and publication of research results.

Postdoctoral Appointees at Washington University

In response to a request by Chancellor Mark Wrighton, the Vice Chancellor for Research convened an ad hoc committee to consider the status of postdoctoral education at Washington University. On behalf of the ad hoc committee, the Vice Chancellor submitted a report to the Executive Committee on Research, which summarizes the committee's findings and recommendations. This policy is an outgrowth of the ad hoc committee's work. By establishing this policy the University clearly states its commitment to providing Washington University postdoctoral appointees with excellent training and professional development opportunities. Specific implementation guidelines will be developed at the school level in order to accommodate the differences that exist among the postdoctoral appointee populations between schools.

Policy

I. Definition of a Postdoctoral Appointee

- 1) The appointee has earned a Ph.D., M.D. or equivalent terminal or doctoral degree.
- 2) The appointment is viewed as a training or transitional period preparatory to an academic, industrial, governmental, or other full-time research or teaching career.
- 3) The appointment is of limited duration generally, not to exceed five years cumulatively unless there are extenuating circumstances.
- 4) The appointment is not part of a clinical training program.
- 5) The appointee trains under the supervision of a faculty member or a department in research.
- 6) The appointee will be classified as a postdoctoral trainee or postdoctoral employee.

II. Appointment Classifications

Postdoctoral appointees will be classified in one of two broad categories described below: postdoctoral trainees and postdoctoral employees. The primary difference between postdoctoral trainees and postdoctoral employees is the description of “the purpose of the appointment.”

Postdoctoral Trainees:

- Meets all elements of the definition of a postdoctoral appointee.
- Purpose: The postdoctoral trainee participates in a teaching and research-training program that develops the individual's research skills for his/her primary benefit.
- Payment Method: The postdoctoral trainee receives a stipend from a training grant (i.e., NRSA) or fellowship awarded either directly to the University or to the individual.
- The postdoctoral trainee does not have an employer-employee relationship with the University.
- The postdoctoral trainee is eligible for: medical coverage, disability, paid holidays, and a minimum of 10 days of paid time off and a minimum of 12 days of sick leave. Postdoctoral trainees may request sick leave and parental leave subject to agency and institutional policies. Because postdoctoral trainees are not employees, retirement benefits and dependent tuition are not available.

Postdoctoral Employee:

- Meets all elements of the definition of a postdoctoral appointee.
- Purpose: The postdoctoral employee performs specific services in exchange for compensation.
- Payment Method: The postdoctoral employee receives a salary.
- The postdoctoral employee is an employee of the University, but not a faculty member and is not entitled to all the privileges available to faculty under the University's Policy on Academic Freedom, Responsibility and Tenure.
- The postdoctoral employee is eligible for: medical coverage, disability, paid holidays, and a minimum of 10 days of paid time off and a minimum of 12 days of sick leave. Postdoctoral employees will also be eligible for family and medical leave. Because postdoctoral appointments are of limited duration, retirement benefits and dependent tuition are not included in the benefit package.

Other Employees who do not meet the definition of a Postdoctoral Appointee:

- There are many individuals with doctoral degrees who are employed by the University in staff or non-core academic positions that are not inherently preparatory or necessarily of a limited duration. These University employees are entitled to all standard University employee benefits.

III. Appointments, Compensation and Benefits

- 1) All postdoctoral appointees will receive standardized annual appointment letters describing the nature of the appointment including career development opportunities and annual performance review procedures.
- 2) All faculty mentors will ensure that postdoctoral appointees are allowed to participate in career development activities throughout their training programs. Each faculty mentor should clarify this commitment in the appointment letters.
- 3) The University recommends that each school adopt the minimum benefits (described above) for all postdoctoral appointees.
- 4) Each School will establish a stipend/compensation minimum for all postdoctoral appointees based on function, specialty, marketability, and funding agency standards. These guidelines will guide advisors in establishing a mutually agreeable stipend/compensation.
- 5) Upon completion of the post-doctoral appointment, all postdoctoral appointees should receive standardized letters signifying that they have successfully completed a postdoctoral appointment. This commitment should be made clear in individual appointment letters.

IV. Problem Resolution

Postdoctoral appointees who have concerns about their particular postdoctoral experience at Washington University are encouraged to address these concerns with their faculty advisor. If the concerns persist the postdoctoral appointee should follow the procedures outlined by their specific school.

V. Postdoctoral Affairs Advisory Committee

Each school will have a Postdoctoral Affairs Advisory Committee that will oversee implementation of this policy and the school specific implementation guidelines, which will be composed of faculty, staff and postdoctoral appointee representatives. Each year the Vice Chancellor for Research will review University-wide issues and data regarding appointment status, stipend levels and benefits with the respective schools.