

# School of Medicine Implementation of the Washington University Postdoctoral Education Policy

February 19, 2004

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## **I. 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. By establishing this policy the University clearly states its commitment to providing Washington University postdoctoral appointees with excellent training and professional development opportunities.

This implementation document defines and sets forth terms and conditions relating to the appointment of postdoctoral positions at the School of Medicine. It applies to both postdoctoral appointees who are employees of the University and those who are appointed as fellows or trainees and receive stipends either by the University or by extramural agencies through the University. The Postdoctoral Policy Review Committee will review and make decisions on any exceptions or clarifications to this policy. The Postdoctoral Policy Review Committee will be chaired by the Associate Dean for Graduate Education and members shall include the Associate Vice Chancellor for Research Administration, the Chair of the Executive Council of the Division of Biology & Biomedical Sciences, a representative of the Office of Post Graduate Affairs, a postdoctoral representative and any others that the Chair designates.

## **II. Definition**

A postdoctoral appointee is defined as follows:

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.

## **III. Responsibilities & Obligations**

The School of Medicine recognizes that the postdoctoral experience is a unique "apprenticeship" between the mentor and the postdoctoral appointee. As such, this relationship assigns certain responsibilities to each party to ensure an optimal training environment.

Obligations of a postdoctoral appointee include:

1. the conscientious discharge of his/her research responsibilities;
2. conformity with ethical standards in research;
3. compliance with good laboratory practice including the maintenance of adequate research records
4. open and timely discussion with his/her mentor regarding possession or distribution of materials, reagents, or records belonging to their laboratory, and any proposed disclosure of findings or techniques privately or in publications;
5. collegial conduct towards co-trainees, staff members and members of the research group; and
6. adherence to all applicable Federal, sponsoring agency and University policies, procedures and regulations. All data, research records and materials and other intellectual property generated in University laboratories remain the property of the University.

Faculty mentors are responsible for guiding and monitoring the advanced training of postdoctoral appointees. Mentorship must go beyond ensuring that quality research is performed and published. The mentor must also help the postdoctoral appointee in career development and must help prepare him/her for the next step in his/her career. A faculty mentor's obligations include:

1. development of a mutually established and well-defined project;
2. supporting the postdoctoral appointee to present his/her findings internally and externally with due recognition;
3. providing career guidance and setting realistic career goals;
4. meeting regularly to discuss project/career progression;
5. conducting a formal annual review of project/career progress; and
6. familiarizing themselves of all University policies regarding postdoctoral appointments.

In their day-to-day interactions with their postdoctoral appointees, mentors should encourage postdoctoral appointees to:

1. manage their own project, which should lead to a first author publication;
2. develop proficiency in their chosen scientific discipline/field;
3. develop proficiency in their technical skills;
4. develop proficiency in their ancillary skills, e.g. writing, public speaking, networking, critical evaluation of scientific documents, etc.;
5. present scientific work both inside and outside the University;
6. write papers for publication in scientific journals; and
7. apply for extramural support, e.g. NRSA postdoctoral fellowships, private foundation fellowships, etc.

#### **IV. Titles**

Postdoctoral appointments are temporary positions with fixed ending dates intended to provide a full-time program of advanced academic preparation and research training. Individuals pursuing clinical fellowships and residencies in the health sciences are excluded from appointment to these titles.

Postdoctoral appointees train under the direction and supervision of faculty mentors in preparation for academic or research careers. In addition to pursuing advanced preparation in research, postdoctoral appointees may be approved to engage in other activities to enhance teaching and other professional skills.

Postdoctoral appointees should be appointed in one of the following two titles:

##### **Postdoctoral Research Associate**

An appointment is made in the title of "Postdoctoral Research Associate" when the appointee performs specific services on a grant or contract in exchange for compensation.

##### **Postdoctoral Research Scholar**

An appointment is made in the title of "Postdoctoral Research Scholar" when the appointee participates in a teaching and research training program, such as a fellowship or training grant, that develops the individual's research skills for his/her primary benefit.

#### **V. Appointment Criteria**

Appointment as a postdoctoral appointee requires a doctoral degree (i.e. Ph.D., M.D., D.Sc.) or the foreign equivalent.

## **VI. Terms of Service**

Postdoctoral appointments are temporary with fixed ending dates. The total duration of an individual's postdoctoral service should not exceed a total of five (5) years, including time spent at other institutions. It is recommended that the initial postdoctoral appointment be within three (3) years of the Ph.D. degree or within six (6) years of the M.D. degree.

In special cases, upon written request of the appointee and the mentor, an exception to the five year rule may be granted by the Postdoctoral Policy Review Committee primarily for reasons of health or family responsibilities.

Postdoctoral appointments are generally contingent on available funding. If a faculty mentor must terminate a postdoctoral appointment prior to the appointment end date due to lack of funding, the postdoctoral appointee will be given a minimum of 30 days written notice prior to such termination.

## **VII. Salary and Stipend**

A minimum salary and stipend shall be established for postdoctoral appointee titles in the School of Medicine upon recommendation by the Vice Chancellor for Research or his/her designee and approval by the Executive Faculty. This minimum salary/stipend for postdoctoral appointees at the School of Medicine will be reviewed on an annual basis at the School of Medicine.

Departments are responsible for establishing the criteria for determining the salaries and stipends of individual postdoctoral appointees. Such criteria may include the individual's qualifications, number of years of experience, performance as a postdoctoral appointee, and competitive salaries and stipends paid by other universities.

When a salary or stipend is established for a postdoctoral appointee, equity among all appointees in the two titles within a department shall be taken into consideration.

When extramural agencies establish stipends at a rate less than the School of Medicine-established minimum, it is required that the principal investigator or department provide additional funding to bring the pay level of the postdoctoral appointee up to at least the established minimum. The mentor is required to arrange the additional funding prior to the beginning date of an appointment.

Annual salary or stipend increases for postdoctoral appointees should be consistent with the overall salary and stipend recommendations by the department or as prescribed by the funding agency.

## **VIII. Appointment Percentage**

Appointments to the postdoctoral appointee title are full-time, based on the expectation that the appointee will be fully involved in scholarly pursuits. In special cases, upon written request of the appointee and approval by the faculty mentor and department head, an exception may be granted by the Postdoctoral Policy Review Committee when the appointee is unable to make a full-time commitment for reason of personal, medical or family issues. Any such request and approval must reflect extramural funding agency requirements.

The faculty mentor and postdoctoral appointee shall delineate in writing the specific reduction in hours of training and concomitant responsibilities in the request process prior to approval.

## **IX. Appointment Status**

A postdoctoral appointee shall be sent a written initial letter of appointment describing the terms of the appointment and referencing the WUSM Implementation document. This letter must be sent as soon as possible and no later than three months from the postdoctoral appointee's initial start date. A copy should be kept on file in the department. Thereafter, postdoctoral appointees will receive an annual communication of their appointment status.

## **X. Equal Opportunity, Nondiscrimination, and Diversity**

Washington University School of Medicine is committed to a university environment that provides equal opportunity and promotes a diversity of backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences among faculty, staff, postdoctoral appointees and the student body. The University does not discriminate in access to, or treatment or employment in, its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, age, religion, sex, sexual orientation, national origin, veteran status, or disability. Inquiries about compliance should be addressed to the Vice Chancellor of Human Resources, Washington University, Campus Box 1184, One Brookings Drive, St. Louis, MO 63130-4899, 314-935-5990.

Departments should strive to have an inclusive, supportive environment that provides postdoctoral training opportunities and maximizes and values the potential of all postdoctoral appointees.

## **XI. Grievances**

### **1) Introduction**

All postdoctoral appointees are entitled to conduct their training at Washington University in an environment that comports with existing University policies, and is free of arbitrary and capricious decisions that adversely affect their existing appointment or training programs. If a postdoctoral appointee believes that an action taken or a decision made adversely affects his/her appointment and/or training program, the postdoctoral appointee may file a grievance under this Policy with the Grievance Liaison, who shall be the Vice Chancellor for Research or his/her designee.

### **2) Informal Grievance Resolution**

Postdoctoral appointees are encouraged to discuss their concerns and/or complaints with their mentors, department heads or other senior faculty members. They may also consult with the Medical School Ombudsperson, the Associate Dean for Graduate Education at an early stage. If informal resolution is attempted but unsuccessful, either a grievant or the Ombudsman may request that the Grievance Liaison assist in resolving the grievance. Where appropriate, the Grievance Liaison may work with the parties to reach an informal resolution.

### **3) Formal Grievance Review**

The postdoctoral appointee may present a grievance that is not resolved informally in writing to the Grievance Liaison in a timely manner. The written grievance shall set forth in detail the facts that form the basis for the grievance, against whom the grievance is directed, on what grounds the grievance is alleged to be a violation, and the remedy sought.

The Grievance Liaison shall initially review the grievance and determine whether the grievance is complete, timely, within the jurisdiction of this policy, and alleges specific facts that, if true, support the allegations made in the grievance.

If the Grievance Liaison determines that the grievance is untimely or outside the jurisdiction of this policy, the grievance will be dismissed. If the Grievance Liaison determines that the grievance is incomplete or factually insufficient, the Grievance Liaison will inform the grievant in writing with regard to the deficiency of the complaint and the timeframe to correct the deficiency. If the grievant fails to make the grievance

complete or provide sufficient facts, the grievance will be dismissed. If all, or any part, of a grievance is dismissed at this stage, the Grievance Liaison will provide the grievant with a written explanation of the basis for the dismissal.

If the grievance involves two or more postdoctoral appointees, or two or more grievances that are based on the same incident or pattern of conduct, the Grievance Liaison may decide, in his/her sole discretion, to consolidate the grievances.

If a grievance is accepted, the Grievance Liaison will select a committee of two impartial faculty members and one postdoctoral representative ("Grievance Committee") to review the grievance. The grievant shall be notified of the committee members and can object if the grievant believes that a committee member has a potential conflict of interest. The Grievance Committee shall review the written grievance; interview the postdoctoral appointee and any other individual that the Grievance Committee thinks would be helpful in their deliberations.

Both the postdoctoral appointee and the Grievance Committee may choose to be accompanied to the interview by up to two advisors. The function and role of the accompanying individual(s) is to provide support, assistance and advice to the grievant or Grievance Committee, and the advisor(s) may not actively participate in the interview.

Within 60 calendar days of the receipt of the grievance by Grievance Committee, the Grievance Committee shall send a written response to the grievant with the Grievance Committee's findings and conclusions, including any remedy the Committee thinks is appropriate.

#### **4) Appeal**

The postdoctoral appointee may appeal the decision of the Grievance Committee in writing to the Dean of the School of Medicine within ten calendar days from the date on which the Grievance Committee response is issued. The appeal must set forth the unresolved issue(s) and the remedy requested. No additional issues shall be introduced in the appeal that were not included in the original grievance.

Within 10 calendar days from receipt of a formal grievance appeal, the Dean of the School of Medicine shall review the Grievance Committee decision and issue a written decision to accept or reject the Grievance Committee's decision. The decision of the Dean of the School of Medicine is final.

#### **5) Remedy**

If the grievance is sustained in whole or in part, the remedy shall not exceed restoring to the postdoctoral appointee the pay, benefits or rights lost as a result of an administrative action that has been found to be arbitrary or capricious.

## **XII. Corrective Action and Dismissal**

It is the policy of the School of Medicine that postdoctoral appointees are given an opportunity to improve whenever behavior, performance, productivity or effectiveness falls below an acceptable level. Violations of standards of conduct may result in one of the following forms of corrective action:

- 1) **Verbal counseling:** informal verbal communication between the postdoctoral appointee and the supervisor or other appropriate person to address the conduct or performance that does not meet the standard for the position.
- 2) **Written warning:** a written document that informs the postdoctoral appointee of the nature of the inadequate performance or misconduct; requirements for continuation in the position; and the consequence of continued inadequate performance or misconduct.
- 3) **Final intervention:** final written warning or suspension without pay for a stated period of time.

- 4) **Dismissal:** termination of a postdoctoral appointee's appointment, prior to the appointment end date, initiated by the department or mentor when the postdoctoral appointee's conduct or performance fails to meet expected or required standards.
- 5) **Other action** consistent with requirements of extramural fellowship agencies.

In determining which disciplinary measure is appropriate, the seriousness of the infraction, the past performance record of the postdoctoral appointee and the circumstances surrounding the matter will be taken into consideration. The progressive procedure does not preclude terminating a postdoctoral appointee at any time if circumstances warrant. The postdoctoral appointee may be dismissed without prior notice for incidents of a serious nature.

Although there is no way to identify every possible violation of standards of conduct, the following is a partial list of infractions, which will result in corrective action, up to, and including termination. This list is intended to be representative of the types of activities that may result in disciplinary action.

- Falsifying personnel, student or other university documents or records
- Unauthorized possession of university or others' property, gambling, carrying weapons or explosives or violating criminal laws on university premises
- Fighting, throwing things, horseplay, practical jokes or other disorderly conduct which may endanger the well being of others on university premises
- Disclosure of confidential and/or patient information
- Engaging in acts of dishonesty, fraud, theft or sabotage
- Threatening, intimidating, coercing, using abusive or vulgar language or interfering with the performance of others
- Inappropriate behavior toward, or discourteous treatment of, patients, students, visitors, co-trainees or other employees, including the use of profanity and other harassing statements
- Insubordination, refusal to comply with instructions or failure to perform reasonable assigned duties
- Failure to maintain professional interpersonal relationship with co-trainees, other staff members, supervisors and customers
- Unauthorized or inappropriate use of university material, time, equipment or property
- Inappropriate use of e-mail, electronic communications, Internet and/or computer networks
- Damaging or destroying university property due to careless or willful acts
- Performance which, in the opinion of university administrators, does not meet the requirements of the position
- Negligence in observing fire prevention and safety rules
- Violation of university or department/program policy, procedures or guidelines.

If the postdoctoral appointee feels that he/she has been dismissed for an arbitrary or capricious reason, the postdoctoral appointee has the right to grieve the action under the Section XI of this Policy.

### **XIII. Benefit Plans**

All postdoctoral appointees whose salaries and stipends are paid through Washington University are eligible for the postdoctoral benefit package as outlined in the Summary of Benefits and maintained by the Human Resources Office at the School of Medicine.