

Washington University Postdoctoral Education Policy

Original: May 2, 2003

Revised: December 8, 2023

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 mission through their generation of new ideas, sharing of research knowledge, publication of research results, and innovation in scholarship, science and medicine to address the most pressing challenges in society.

In 2000, the National Academy of Sciences produced a report on the postdoctoral experience across the nation. In response, the Chancellor requested the Vice Chancellor for Research to convene an ad hoc committee to consider the status of postdoctoral education at Washington University. In 2003, based on the recommendation of the ad hoc committee, a policy on postdoctoral education was approved. In 2023, twenty years after the original document, the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research and the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs revised the policy to update terminology, clarify, and expand the policy terms. The policy received input from the Deans of the schools and was approved by the Provost.

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

Policy

Section I: Definition of a Postdoctoral Appointee

- (1) The appointee has earned a Ph.D., M.D., or equivalent terminal doctoral degree.
- (2) The appointment is viewed as a time-limited period of mentored research or scholarly work for acquiring the professional skills needed to pursue a career path of the appointee's choosing. The appointment is not a faculty role.
- (3) The appointment is of limited duration, not to exceed five years cumulatively across relevant postdoctoral appointments (see Section III). Extenuating circumstances may justify a short extension of a postdoctoral appointment.
- (4) The appointment is not part of a clinical training program.
- (5) The appointment is full time (1.0 FTE) based on the expectation that the appointee will be fully involved in scholarly responsibilities and professional development.

- (6) The appointee works under the supervision of a faculty member who acts as a mentor or a designated person in a department, unit, or division.
- (7) The appointee will be classified as a Postdoctoral Research Scholar or Postdoctoral Research Associate.

Section II: Appointment Classifications

The primary difference between Postdoctoral Research Scholars and Postdoctoral Research Associates is their employee status.

Postdoctoral Research Scholar:

- Meets all elements of the definition of a postdoctoral appointee.
- Employee Status: The Postdoctoral Research Scholar is not considered as a university employee, but for academic purposes is affiliated to the University. Tax calendar and obligations may differ from those considered employees.
- Payment Method: The Postdoctoral Research Scholar receives a stipend from a training grant (e.g., NIH NRSA) or a fellowship awarded directly to the University or to the individual.
- Benefits Eligibility: The Postdoctoral Research Scholar is eligible for health and other benefits, as described on the Human Resources website (<https://hr.wustl.edu/benefits/change/hire/postdoctoral/>) and the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs website (<https://postdoc.wustl.edu/policies-benefits/>).

Postdoctoral Research Associate:

- Meets all elements of the definition of a postdoctoral appointee.
- Employee Status: The Postdoctoral Research Associate is an employee of the University.
- Payment Method: The Postdoctoral Research Associate receives a salary.
- Benefits Eligibility: The Postdoctoral Research Associate is eligible for health and other benefits, as described on the Human Resources website (<https://hr.wustl.edu/benefits/change/hire/postdoctoral/>) and the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs website (<https://postdoc.wustl.edu/policies-benefits/>).

Section III: Appointments, Compensation, and Benefits

- (1) All postdoctoral appointees should complete an annual review with their faculty supervisor. A postdoctoral annual review template is available on the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs' webpage (<https://postdoc.wustl.edu/policies-benefits/>).
- (2) All postdoctoral appointees must receive at least the minimum compensation annually set by the Vice Chancellor for Research. In addition, all postdoctoral appointees are also eligible to

receive annual increases to bring their compensation above the minimum to appropriately reflect their experience and annual review performance.

- (3) The University recommends that all faculty mentors ensure that postdoctoral appointees are allowed at least 10% of their effort to participate in career and professional development activities throughout their postdoctoral appointment. Each faculty mentor should include this commitment in the appointment letter.
- (4) All postdoctoral appointees from all schools are eligible for the benefits assigned to their classification as Postdoctoral Research Associates or Postdoctoral Research Scholars, as described on the Human Resources website (<https://hr.wustl.edu/benefits/change/hire/postdoctoral/>) and the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs website (<https://postdoc.wustl.edu/policies-benefits/>).
- (5) Every year the Vice Chancellor for Research will approve the minimum compensation (salary or stipend) for all postdoctoral appointees based on national data and the recommendation of the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs. Information for the current fiscal year can be found on the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs website (<https://postdoc.wustl.edu/policies-benefits/compensation/>).
- (6) When extramural agencies set stipends for fellowships or training grants at a rate less than the University 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.
- (7) Postdoctoral appointments have a 5-year term limit, including previous postdoctoral or on-the-job training and experience in other institutions. Relevant postdoctoral experience that may count towards the 5-year term limit can be found on the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs' website (<https://postdoc.wustl.edu/who-is-a-postdoc/>). Scholars with more than 5 years of postdoctoral or on-the-job training and experience cannot join the University as postdoctoral appointees.
- (8) Once the 5-year term limit is reached, current postdoctoral appointees must transition to positions within or outside the University that are more appropriate for their level of training, expertise, and independence. The Office of Postdoctoral Affairs Faculty Advisory Committee may grant exceptions to the 5-year term limit for justified, extenuating circumstances. Extension request procedures can be found on the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs' website (<https://postdoc.wustl.edu/policies-benefits/appointment-extension/>).

Section 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 mentors. If the concerns persist, the postdoctoral appointee should follow the procedures outlined by the University or their specific school.

Section V: Office of Postdoctoral Affairs Faculty Advisory Committee

Each school may appoint no more than two representatives to the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs Faculty Advisory Committee. The decision to appoint one or two Faculty Advisors may depend on the number of postdoctoral appointees the school has.

Section VI: Policy Review and Implementation

Each year, based on the information provided by the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs, the Vice Chancellor for Research will review University-wide postdoctoral appointment statuses, compensation levels, benefits, quality of mentoring, and career and professional development programs. If there are any issues to address, the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs will propose corrective measures (including changes to policies or guidelines) for the consideration of the Vice Chancellor for Research. The Vice Chancellor for Research will determine the appropriate interventions or corrective measures to address issues in the postdoctoral experience.