

Guidelines for the Appointment of Postdoctoral Fellows

University of Maryland School of Pharmacy

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Postdoctoral training is, with increasing frequency, becoming a required step on the path to a research career in the biomedical sciences. The number of postdoctoral fellows is growing, as is the average time spent in postdoctoral positions prior to the initiation of an independent research career. An important correlate of this situation is the major contribution made by postdoctoral fellows to the national research enterprise. Postdoctoral positions are not, however, generally well defined, with the result that not all fellows are treated equally and some find that their expectations have not been met.

In 1998, the Committee on Postdoctoral Education of the Association of American Universities issued a report and recommendations¹. On November 19, 1999, the Executive Committee of the Association of American Medical Colleges endorsed that report and urged member institutions to adopt its recommendations². After careful study of these reports, the University of Maryland School of Pharmacy has established the following guidelines for the conduct of postdoctoral training. These guidelines address four major areas: (1) the definition of a postdoctoral appointment; (2) the terms of such an appointment, including duration, compensation, and benefits, (3) the designation of an office responsible for ensuring that institutional responsibilities to the postdoctoral community are met; and (4) the responsibilities of faculty mentors of postdoctoral fellows. It should be noted that these guidelines are also consistent with the recent National Research Council publication *Enhancing the Postdoctoral Experience for Scientists and Engineers*³.

The Postdoctoral Appointment: Definition

A postdoctoral appointment is characterized by all of the following:

- the trainee is a University of Maryland employee classified as either “Post Doctoral”, “Clinical”, or “Research” Fellow (see “UMB Policy Concerning Employment of Employee/Trainee Personnel in the Fellow Series” (1998));
- the appointee has recently earned a Ph.D., Pharm.D. or other terminal doctoral degree (*e.g.*, D.D.S., EdD, D.M.D., J.D., or M.D.); the appointment is temporary;
- the appointment involves substantially full-time research or scholarship;
- the appointment is viewed as preparatory for a full-time academic and/or research career;

¹ Association of American Universities Committee on Postdoctoral Education (1998) [*Report and Recommendations*](#).

² Association of American Medical Colleges (1999) [*Addressing the Nation’s Changing Needs for Biomedical Behavioral Scientists*](#).

- the appointee is under the supervision of a faculty mentor; and
- the appointee has the freedom, and is expected, to publish the results of his or her research or scholarship during the period of the appointment.

Terms of Appointment

Recruitment: Postdoctoral fellows are generally recruited to the institution by the faculty mentor with whom they will work. Because postdoctoral positions represent temporary training positions, postdoctoral recruitment may proceed outside the human resources procedures that govern the regular university hiring process. All faculty mentors must not discriminate in regard to gender, age, disability, ethnicity, race, or sexual orientation.

Duration: Postdoctoral appointments at the University of Maryland School of Pharmacy will not normally exceed a term of three years. It is understood, however, that some programs or departments may provide well thought-out postdoctoral experiences that are four or five years in duration. If, at the end of the initial appointment, it is apparent that additional benefit would accrue to the postdoctoral fellow, application can be made to the Dean of the School of Pharmacy for an extension.

Permission to continue in a postdoctoral capacity for a total period in excess of the initial appointment period will be contingent upon demonstration that the fellow will be continuing his/her research development by gaining exposure to a significantly different area of investigation or furthering accomplishments in the area of investigation carried out during the first period. In no case will a postdoctoral appointment exceed a total of six years, regardless of the sites at which the positions were held.

The intent of this policy is to formalize the temporary nature of the postdoctoral experience. If the fellow and the School of Pharmacy wish to continue their established work relationship beyond the initial appointment and any approved extension, then the fellow should be hired according to the standard University practices that cover employees and provided with a full package of University benefits.

Compensation: The minimum salary for all full-time postdoctoral appointees is the lowest ('0 Years of Experience') N.I.H. postdoctoral stipend level. Exceptions must be approved by the chair of the department and the Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Education in the University Of Maryland School Of Pharmacy. Postdoctoral appointees shall receive annual increases at reappointment that are consistent with the cost of living increases allowed for faculty and other employees. Increases in stipend compensation may also include merit raises based on performance. Departments may establish their own guidelines as long as the pay rates meet or exceed those established by this policy.

Benefits: Those appointed as Postdoctoral Fellows will obtain employee benefits. The trainee is entitled to Employee health insurance, including the ability to purchase subsidized insurance for dependents; the employee must select health coverage offered by the University of Maryland and in accordance with UM Policies. Effective January 1, 2005, the School of Pharmacy also provides the following annual leave package: Sick Leave 5 days; Vacation Leave 10 days;

Holiday Leave 11 days. Leave will be earned on a pro-rated basis based on the percentage of employment, over the period of a calendar year. Leave must be taken during the year it is earned and will not be carried over to the following year. The department chair may approve special exceptions and requests to carry leave over to the following year. There will be no payment for unused leave when employment as a Postdoctoral Fellow in the School of Pharmacy is terminated. The employee is also entitled to all other benefits as defined by the appropriate UMB polices. See: <http://www.hr.umaryland.edu/benefits/summaryofbenefits.pdf>

Taxes & Benefits

Post doctoral fellows, clinical fellows, and research fellows are employee/trainees. They are treated as employees of the University for purposes of federal taxation and state taxation, but not for all purposes. They are subject to income tax withholding and FICA withholding unless their incomes are exempted by tax treaty, Act of Congress applicable to a specific program, or for other reason. In other words, they are almost never exempted from taxation. Employee/trainees will be eligible for University health insurance options available to employees. The limitations related to funding sources will apply in the case of employee/trainees. Employee/trainees will not be eligible to participate in the state retirement plan and will not be offered other University retirement plan options.

Appointment/termination: Each postdoctoral appointee will receive, prior to his/her employment, an appointment letter, signed by the faculty member extending the offer and by the department chair or other responsible School of Pharmacy official, detailing the period of the appointment, compensation, and benefits. Copies of the applicable School of Pharmacy policies and guidelines should accompany the letter. Every effort will be made to notify a trainee at least 60 days prior to termination of his/her appointment. Prior to termination of the trainee's appointment, the trainee must expend all unused leave.

Needs of International Post-Doctoral Fellows

In addition to all traditional rules of employment, international post-doctoral fellows will require a valid visa in order to enter and work in a US academic institution. In order to fulfill document requirements that provide a lawful entry of international post-doctoral fellows into the United States, the faculty member hiring the post-doc(s) will inform and work with the Department representative within the school to provide all information necessary for the obtaining of an appropriate visa. The visa(s) request are then sent to the appropriate office at the University of Maryland Baltimore that deals with visas – Records and Registration, which will prepare and provide the necessary documents to allow the post-doctoral fellows to apply for a visa. For more information on international students/exchange visitors see:

<http://www.umaryland.edu/ois/international/admissions.html> or contact them by email at visas@umaryland.edu. Use ois-info@umaryland.edu

The Faculty mentor may not permit the postdoctoral fellow to begin work until all I-9 forms have been completed and/or until all required visa documents are in place.

Institutional Responsibilities

School of Pharmacy

The Associate Dean for Research is responsible for implementing these guidelines and will strive to define and enhance the status of postdoctoral fellows, and will ensure that policies governing postdoctoral fellows are applied consistently. The Associate Dean for Research will facilitate interaction among the widely dispersed population of fellows and will act as an advocate and facilitator to assure that the postdoctoral fellow is informed about employee benefits available through the Human Resources Department and make sure that the mentor and department are supportive of the fellow seeking such services. Should a problem arise that cannot be resolved informally, fellows will follow established employee grievance policies in effect at the School of Pharmacy.

Responsibilities of the Faculty Mentor

Postdoctoral training has become a required credential for many of those trained in the biomedical sciences. The faculty mentor of each postdoctoral fellow is in a unique position to insure that the experience makes a suitable and substantial contribution to the professional development of the fellow. At the same time, the need of the mentor to advance a particular project may, upon occasion, conflict with the training needs of the postdoctoral fellow. The School of Pharmacy expects the mentors of post-doctoral fellows to:

- make sufficient time available to the postdoctoral fellow to insure a productive experience;
- encourage open discussion of the postdoctoral training experience;
- assist his/her postdoctoral trainee to acquire the skills essential to a productive career, including the ability to communicate effectively both orally and in writing; to work in teams; and to see the science being pursued, both in his/her own laboratory and in other venues, in the broadest of terms;
- assist and/or encourage the postdoctoral trainee to develop knowledge of career options and the means for achieving particular career goals;
- ensure that the postdoctoral trainee has ample opportunities to present research findings at professional meetings and symposia;
- provide regular feedback to the postdoctoral trainee on his/her performance and ways in which that performance might be improved; and
- if interested in an academic career, provide opportunities for the trainee to develop expertise in teaching and will, to the extent possible, share insights into other academic duties.

Responsibilities of the Postdoctoral Fellow

Postdoctoral fellows must comply with all applicable UMB policies. Postdoctoral fellows must also take ownership for the development of their professional careers. This may require the fellow to seek assistance on the pathway best suited to his/her skills and personal goals. The fellow should, therefore, ask the counsel of his/her faculty mentor in choosing a career. In addition the aforementioned UMB policies, to achieve his/her long-term goals, the University of Maryland School of Pharmacy expects post-doctoral fellows to be professional in the performance of their research. This will require the postdoctoral fellow to:

- (a) be responsible for the responsible and ethical conduct of research;
- (b) be in compliance with following safety rules according to NIH, OSHA and University of Maryland guidelines;
- (c) report results in laboratory notebooks that are comprehensible and organized in a timely manner and in such a fashion that the post-doctoral mentor will be able to find and interpret data pertinent to the research;
- (d) be responsible for the creation of manuscripts, including the organization of data in journal acceptable formats and the participation in the writing of the article;
- (e) leave in the mentor's laboratory, upon completion of the post-doctoral training, original copies of the research in appropriate laboratory notebooks and in electronic forms;
- (f) international postdoctoral fellows are encouraged and expected to develop and/or implement the use of excellent oral and written communication skills in English, the recognized language for the dissemination of scientific knowledge.