



Postdoctoral Scholars

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Responsible Office: Office of the Vice President for Research and Innovation

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Policy Statement and Purpose

Postdoctoral scholars are an essential component of the research program at Virginia Commonwealth University. The important role postdoctoral scholars fulfill within the university is recognized, as is the institution's commitment to the training of the next generation of scientists. The focus of the university's program is to provide postdoctoral scholars with academic training through on-site practical experience. The university adopts this Postdoctoral Scholars Policy to delineate the obligations and expectations of the scholars, faculty mentors, departments, and all those involved in postdoctoral scholar training. All postdoctoral scholars must comply with the requirements set forth in this policy and applicable university policies governing their conduct as members of the university community.

Noncompliance with this policy may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination. VCU supports an environment free from retaliation. Retaliation against any employee who brings forth a good faith concern, asks a clarifying question, or participates in an investigation is prohibited.

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Who Should Know This Policy _____

Postdoctoral scholars, and all faculty and administrative personnel who are involved in the recruitment, appointment, or training of postdoctoral scholars.

Definitions _____

All definitions are incorporated into the body of this policy.

- Postdoctoral Scholar - Affiliate
- Postdoctoral Scholar - Fellow
- Postdoctoral Scholar - Trainee

Contacts _____

The Office of the Vice President for Research and Innovation officially interprets this policy. Please direct policy questions to the Office of Postdoctoral Services within the Office of the Vice President for Research and Innovation.

Policy Specifics and Procedures _____

I. Definition and Categories of Postdoctoral Scholar

At Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) a postdoctoral scholar is an individual who comes to VCU for the purpose of engaging in advanced research training following receipt of a Ph.D. or appropriate first professional degree (e.g. M.D.). They primarily perform work requiring advanced knowledge in the fields of science and/or learning. Postdoctoral scholars are appointed on a full-time basis for fixed terms (typically of one year's duration each), not to exceed 5 years. The training is conducted under the mentorship and supervision of an established member of the VCU faculty who is at the Assistant Professor level or above. Research training should be the primary objective, but the specific program may include research, teaching and service activities directed to enhancing the career development of the individual. In the context of this Policy, the term "postdoctoral" does not refer to training periods in which the primary objective is the achievement of certification for added professional qualifications. Individuals pursuing clinical fellowships

and residencies in the health sciences similarly are excluded from appointment to these titles, as are those who come to VCU for limited term appointments as “visiting scholars.”

Postdoctoral scholars fall into one of the three defined categories below:

Postdoctoral Scholar – Fellow

An appointment is made to the title “Postdoctoral Scholar – Fellow” when (1) the agency funding the salary requires or permits the appointee to be classified as an employee of the University, or (2) whenever General Funds, or other University funds are used to support the position. Fellows are typically employed to work and train with faculty on the faculty member’s research project. Fellows are limited status employees with only those employee entitlements and/or benefits outlined in this policy. Fellows are deemed to split their time between training and education, and salaried work activities.

Postdoctoral Scholar –Trainee

An appointment is made to the title “Postdoctoral Scholar –Trainee” when the Postdoctoral Scholar has been awarded a fellowship or traineeship for postdoctoral study by an extramural agency and the fellowship or traineeship is paid through a University account, but not through the university Human Resources payroll system. Trainees receive a stipend to pursue an individually defined training program.

Postdoctoral Scholar – Affiliate

An appointment is made to the title “Postdoctoral Scholar – Affiliate” when the postdoctoral scholar has been awarded a fellowship or traineeship for postdoctoral study by an extramural/external agency/organization and the extramural/external agency/organization pays the fellowship or traineeship directly to the postdoctoral scholar, rather than through the University. Such appointments shall have a “without salary” status.

II. Credentials and Appointment of Postdoctoral Scholars

Candidates from institutions outside the U.S. must hold advanced degrees which are equivalent to those awarded by U.S. institutions to qualify for appointment. An original transcript or diploma documenting the awarding of the degree must be available for review to the department/unit hiring official, and other university offices that may require proof of receipt of the degree (e.g., the Global Education Office) at the time the appointment begins. Graduates of U.S. institutions who have completed all degree requirements but have not been formally awarded the degree may be issued a postdoctoral scholar appointment letter based upon written verification that all degree requirements have been completed from the appropriate *institutional* office of the degree-awarding institution. Failure to timely provide appropriate documentation of a doctorate or equivalent degree may result in dismissal for cause.

III. Postdoctoral Scholar Obligations and Rights

Orientation

Postdoctoral scholars are required to attend an orientation meeting with the Coordinator of the Office of Postdoctoral Services before the end of the first week of their postdoctoral appointment. Failure to attend

an orientation session in a timely manner may result in a delay in the processing of the employment paperwork for the postdoctoral scholar.

Postdoctoral Scholar Responsibilities as a Mentee

The position of a postdoctoral scholar is for the purpose of receiving advanced research training, and is meant to be a temporary appointment. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the postdoctoral scholar to work with his/her mentor to develop and implement a plan for transition to a career as an independent scholar.

Compliance with Policies

All postdoctoral scholars must comply with policies and procedures described and referenced in this policy, and those defined as "Fellows" must comply with all policies applicable to employees of the university. Relevant policies and procedures include, but are not limited to, observation of appropriate federal and state guidelines regarding human subjects, animal subjects and biohazards, conflict of interests, intellectual property, misconduct in research and scholarly activities, research data ownership, retention, and access, the VCU Code of Conduct, and policies addressing discrimination and sexual misconduct/violence. It is the responsibility of the postdoctoral scholar to be aware of these policies and procedures. Also, in the course of their appointment, postdoctoral scholars may have access to confidential information regarding employees, students, patients, the public, or to proprietary or other confidential information belonging to or in the possession of VCU. This information is to remain confidential, and may be disclosed only in strict accordance with federal or state law and/or University Regulations and policy.

Research Records, Data, Results

Research records, data, and results created by postdoctoral scholars during the period of their appointment are the property of Virginia Commonwealth University. All such records, data, and results are retained by the University on departure of the individual. Subject to the approval of the faculty mentor, copies of the some or all of the records, data, results may be obtained and used by the postdoctoral scholar, consistent with any required restrictions set by the faculty mentor.

Intellectual Property

The University retains all rights, title, and interest in any and all intellectual property generated, created, or developed in facilities operated or controlled by the University, supported by funds administered by the University, and/or performed in the course of regular duties by University members, including postdoctoral scholars, unless exempted by other provisions of this policy.

Responsible Conduct of Research

Within 1 year of their appointment, all postdoctoral scholars must provide to the Office of Postdoctoral Services verification of having completed an educational program in responsible conduct of research offered through VCU. A list of responsible conduct of research courses offered through VCU can be found at: http://www.research.vcu.edu/responsible_conduct/rcr_courses.pdf. In addition, postdoctoral scholars supported by NIH or NSF funds must comply with the VCU policy on NSF and NIH Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) Training Requirements.

Institutional Review Board (IRB) and Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) Submissions

Postdoctoral scholars are not eligible to be the Principal Investigator (PI) on IRB applications.

Postdoctoral scholars in the Trainee classification may serve as a PI on IACUC applications when required by certain granting agencies. In such cases, the co-investigator must be a faculty member of VCU (who may be referred to as a sponsor or faculty mentor in the grant proposal) and is ultimately responsible to VCU for the supervision of the protocol.

Application for Grants

Postdoctoral scholars may serve as a PI for a training grant when required by the sponsor. In addition, on a case-by-case basis, a postdoctoral scholar may be permitted PI status with approval by the Vice President for Research and Innovation. The procedures for submission for a case-by-case review can be found in the procedure section of the Principal Investigator Eligibility policy.

IV. Faculty Mentor/Department Obligations

Faculty Mentor Responsibilities

Faculty mentors' responsibilities include: (i) developing in consultation with the postdoctoral scholar a mutually satisfactory research project or scholarly program; (ii) providing oversight of the research performed by the postdoc (iii) encouraging postdoctoral scholars to present their work, and to publish their results in a timely fashion; (iv) encouraging postdoctoral scholars to acquire and enhance their knowledge and technical skills as dictated by their current and future needs; (v) providing an opportunity for the scholar to explore future career options and receive career counseling; (vi) arrangement and oversight of teaching opportunities as appropriate to their discipline and program; (vii) encouraging postdoctoral scholars to apply for training and research support as appropriate; (viii) meeting regularly with their postdoctoral scholars to discuss progress in their research; (ix) providing an annual review of performance based upon written mutually agreed expectations of progress and performance; (x) insuring that postdoctoral scholars are aware of University policies regarding postdoctoral training, and are instructed about research policies of the University. Faculty mentors are also responsible for assuring that postdoctoral scholars are provided with any unit-level orientation materials.

Contribution to Health Insurance

The faculty mentor/department must provide payment/contribution toward the cost of full coverage of health insurance for the postdoctoral scholar. This may be equal to the cost of individual basic coverage from a designated plan offered through the Office of Postdoctoral Services or, with approval from the Office of Postdoctoral Services, reimbursement to the scholar for his/her purchase of health insurance on another plan with appropriate documentation to support reimbursement and coverage. Payment/contribution toward the cost of health insurance is terminated when the postdoctoral scholar's appointment ends. Failure by the faculty mentor/department to notify the Office of Postdoctoral Services when insurance should be terminated will result in the faculty mentor/department being responsible for any insurance charges incurred after the insurance should have been terminated.

Notification of Changes to Appointments

Office of Postdoctoral Services must be notified immediately when there are changes to the appointment of a postdoctoral scholar. Changes include but are not limited to: (i) change in faculty mentor (ii) change in department; (iii) termination of the appointment.

V. Compensation and Benefits for Postdoctoral Scholars

Benefits associated with postdoctoral appointments are terminated when an individual is no longer a postdoctoral scholar at VCU.

Compensation Level

Starting stipends/salaries for all postdoctoral scholars, regardless of their source of funding, are expected to meet the annual minimum standards established by the Fair Labor Standards Act for exempt employees, relevant regulatory bodies, the Office of Postdoctoral Services or sponsor requirements, whichever is higher. A department/school may establish a higher minimum stipend/salary level for postdoctoral scholars paid within that school.

Health Insurance

As noted above, the conditions of appointment for scholars paid through the university include payment/contribution toward the cost of full coverage of health insurance for the postdoctoral scholar. This may be equal to the cost of basic individual coverage from a designated plan offered through the Office of Postdoctoral Services or, with approval from the Office of Postdoctoral Services, reimbursement to the scholar for his/her purchase of health insurance on another plan with appropriate documentation to support reimbursement and coverage. This benefit is paid as an addition to the salary/stipend level, with no deduction being made from the salary/stipend paid to the postdoctoral scholar. The additional cost for premiums in higher level plans, and the cost of health insurance coverage for spouse and/or dependents are the responsibility of the postdoctoral scholar, unless the conditions of appointment state otherwise. Any additional premium costs must be paid by the postdoctoral scholar to VCU. VCU is responsible for making payment to the insurance company. It is the responsibility of the postdoctoral scholar to immediately notify the Office of Postdoctoral Services and her/his department if he/she is leaving his/her postdoctoral position at VCU, or if there are any changes in health insurance coverage (such as change in number of dependents covered). If additional insurance premium charges are incurred because of a failure by the postdoctoral scholar to provide prompt notification of changes, the postdoctoral scholar will be required to cover these costs. Payment/contribution by the institution toward the cost of health insurance is terminated when the postdoctoral scholar's appointment ends.

Retirement Plan Participation

Postdoctoral scholars in the **fellow classification** have the option of participating in the VCU 403(b) Tax-Deferred Annuity (TDA) program, as allowed by Section 403(b) of the federal tax code and/or the Commonwealth of Virginia 457 Deferred Compensation Plan as allowed by Section 457(b) of the federal tax code. Contributions can be made with pre-tax income or with post-tax income (Roth contributions). For details about the VCU plan, visit <http://www.hr.vcu.edu/benefits/benefits-list/tax-deferred-annuity-and-cash-match-programs/>, and for details about the Commonwealth of Virginia plan visit <http://www.varetirement.org/dcp.html>. Postdoctoral participants are not eligible for cash matches from VCU or the Commonwealth.

Tuition Costs

In accordance with the provisions for unfunded scholarships Chapter 875, 2007 Acts of Assembly Section 4-2.01.b.6, full-time postdoctoral scholars may apply for tuition assistance/scholarship to defray the costs of tuition for training related courses. The postdoctoral scholar must submit the tuition assistance request form to his/her faculty mentor for approval. If approved by the faculty mentor, the signed application for the tuition assistance/scholarship must be submitted to the Office of Postdoctoral Services for final approval. Final approval will be based on available funds. Postdoctoral scholars in the trainee classification may be

eligible to have tuition costs provided through their department/school as an allowable expense as described in the trainee award/grant.

Paid Leave Time

The postdoctoral scholar in the fellow classification is eligible for 20 days paid leave in each appointment year in addition to designated University holidays. These leave days can be used for any combination of vacation and sick leave. Leave is not cumulative from one appointment year to the next. Unused leave will not be paid out when the postdoctoral appointment ends. Work performed on site on University holidays may be added to paid leave by arrangement with the faculty mentor. All leave for vacation purposes must be approved in advance by the faculty mentor, and, if an international postdoctoral scholar, any travel outside the U.S. must be approved by VCU Immigration Services. Paid leave eligibility for postdoctoral scholar-trainees is governed by the funding source. Please refer to your funding source documentation.

Family and Medical Leave

Postdoctoral scholars in the fellow classification may be eligible for unpaid family and medical leave (FMLA) for certain family and medical reasons in accordance with Federal and State law. Information regarding FMLA eligibility is available at <http://www.hr.vcu.edu/payroll-and-leave/leave/family-and-medical-leave/>.

Family and medical leave eligibility for postdoctoral scholar-trainees is governed by the funding source. Please refer to your funding source documentation.

VI. Exceptions

Unless otherwise stipulated, requests for exceptions to any of these policies must be submitted by the faculty mentor, and reviewed and approved by the department chair, or if the department chair is the faculty mentor, by the dean of the school/college. If approved by the department chair or dean, the request must be submitted to the Office of Postdoctoral Services for final review and approval.

VII. Appointment

The duration of an appointment will be noted in the initial letter of appointment. Appointments are for no longer than one year with the potential for renewal, if appropriate, based on satisfactory progress, performance, programmatic need, and availability of funding. Postdoctoral appointments should not exceed a total of five years for all combined years of institutional training. Exceptions to extend the appointment beyond 5 years may be made in one year increments with prior written permission of the Department/School and final review and approval by the Office of Postdoctoral Services. Examples of reasons for exceptions might include postdoctoral scholars who begin a second postdoctoral appointment in a new field; postdoctoral scholars who are on a training grant that extends beyond the five-year period and the agency sponsor allows a longer postdoctoral training appointment period; or those who request an extension due to a leave of absence.

Note: International postdoctoral scholars may have visa restrictions that limit the length of their time in the United States. All proposed extensions of appointments for international postdoctoral scholars require prior consultation with the Global Education Office and approval by the appropriate institutional office and/or federal agency during its term, an appointment is contingent upon satisfactory performance and the

availability of funding. At the end of the term and subject to any limits, the appointment may be eligible for renewal, based on satisfactory progress, performance, the existence of funding, and programmatic need.

General Information Regarding Appointment Processing

Individuals interested in applying for postdoctoral study at VCU should make their inquiries directly to the faculty mentor or academic department or school in which they are seeking appointment. The title of a Postdoctoral Scholar appointment is determined by the source of funding for the appointment.

Conditions of Appointment

The offer of appointment is conditional upon job related background checks and the Scholar's consent to a criminal history records check. Criminal conviction investigations also will be conducted in connection with certain transfers and promotions as described within the Criminal Conviction Investigation policy. As required by state law, the offer is conditional upon U.S. citizens verifying that they have registered for the Selective Service or providing documentation from the Selective Service System that their requirement to register has been "terminated or become inapplicable." VCU is required by state law to ask each new employee (i.e., postdoctoral scholars in the fellow classification) if he/she has an income withholding order for child support payments. An affirmative response will not adversely affect the Scholar's employment with Virginia Commonwealth University. A U.S. Department of Justice I-9 Employment Eligibility Verification also must be completed on or before the date employment begins.

Letter of Appointment

The faculty mentor and/or department chair are responsible for sending an offer letter to the scholar. The letter offering appointment as a postdoctoral scholar must be communicated to the candidate prior to the commencement of duties by the scholar after consultation with the administrative office of the unit in which the appointment will be effected. The letter must set forth the basic terms of the appointment as indicated in the letter templates available for the relevant postdoctoral scholar classification (fellow, trainee and affiliate). Appointment letters must include a signature line for the candidate to confirm acceptance of the terms of the offer of appointment. The candidate must return a countersigned copy of the letter to the unit in which the appointment is effected.

Appointment Processing of Postdoctoral Scholars

Departments/schools must forward all postdoctoral appointment papers to the Office of Postdoctoral Services in advance of, or concurrent with, the proposed start date for the appointment. Appointment papers include:

- Applicant's CV or resume
- A copy of the appointment letter signed by the applicant accepting the position
- PAF or a copy of the purchase order and a Postdoctoral Payment Schedule as appropriate for the Scholar-Fellow and Scholar-Trainee.

Appointment Processing of International Postdoctoral Scholars

When appointing an international postdoctoral scholar, the department/school must follow procedures defined by the Immigration Services office of the Global Education Office. This office is the University office authorized to issue documents which permit the individual to apply for an appropriate visa. If the source of funding or terms of appointment change, the sponsoring department/school/faculty mentor must immediately inform VCU Immigration Services.

Appointment Processing of Postdoctoral Scholar – Fellow

Upon receipt and review by the Office of Postdoctoral Services, the appropriate employment paperwork (including PAF) will be forwarded to Human Resources for the postdoctoral scholar in the fellow classification to be paid as an employee of the university.

Appointment Processing of Postdoctoral Scholar – Trainee

Upon receipt and review by the Office of Postdoctoral Services, a copy of the purchase order and a Post-Doctoral Payment Schedule will be sent to Accounts Payable for a postdoctoral scholar in the trainee classification.

Appointment Processing of Postdoctoral Scholar – Affiliate

Departments/schools should forward CV/resume and letter of appointment to the Office of Postdoctoral Services, and enter the appropriate data on the postdoctoral scholar in the affiliate classification into the University's Affiliate database in Banner.

Renewal of Appointment

Renewal of appointment should only be done after a written evaluation of the postdoctoral scholar's performance and verification of the scholar's successful completion of the required Responsible Conduct of Research course. If an appointment is renewed or extended, the postdoctoral scholar must receive a letter documenting the renewal of the appointment. The letter must set forth the basic terms of the reappointment as specified in the reappointment letter template applicable to the classification of the postdoctoral scholar. Renewal letters must include a signature line for the candidate to confirm acceptance of the terms of the offer of appointment. The candidate must return a countersigned copy of the letter to the unit in which the appointment is effected.

Evaluation of Postdoctoral Scholars

The faculty mentor of a postdoctoral scholar must complete an annual written evaluation of the scholar's performance. The evaluation process should be based on expectations that have been established for the postdoctoral scholar and on his/her progress toward overall career goals. These expectations should be developed in writing with the postdoctoral scholar at the beginning of the appointment period, with opportunity for review and revision as the appointment progresses. The evaluation process should include the opportunity for the scholar to respond in writing to the evaluation. A copy of the evaluation form should be maintained in the departmental/school personnel file of the postdoctoral scholar.

End of Appointment

Postdoctoral Scholar Notice of Resignation

When a postdoctoral scholar chooses to resign from the position prior to the end of an appointment period, a minimum of one month's notice is expected. Notice of the resignation of a postdoctoral scholar must be forwarded to the department/school and the Office of Postdoctoral Services, and, if an international scholar, to the Global Education Office.

Termination of the Appointment:

Faculty mentors may terminate appointees *during an appointment period* if factors warrant termination for cause (i.e., unsatisfactory performance as determined by faculty mentor, violation of applicable university policy, or violation of state or federal law). Termination of an appointment must be communicated in writing to the postdoctoral scholar with a copy forwarded to the department/school and the Office of Postdoctoral

Services, and, if an international scholar, to the Global Education Office. This letter must state the specific reasons for termination. Postdoctoral scholars should be given a 30 day notice of termination and provided the opportunity to respond to the faculty mentor/department before the effective date of the termination. If immediate termination is warranted, the scholar can be placed on administrative leave with pay for the 30-day period.

Responsibilities at End of Appointment

Regardless of whether a postdoctoral appointment ends due to resignation, termination or expiration of the term of appointment, postdoctoral scholars must complete their responsibilities prior to leaving the university. First, the postdoctoral scholar must submit research results, if any, to his or her faculty mentor. Second, the postdoctoral scholar must leave his or her research records and data in compliance with university -policy which can be accessed at <http://www.policy.vcu.edu/policies/research>. The research records are property of the University and the University retains the right to disclose and use such materials and information for any purpose during and after the appointment.

The postdoctoral scholar must notify the Office of Postdoctoral Services to terminate the insurance coverage at the end of the appointment.

You may refer to the Guidelines for Separating Non-Benefited Employees found at http://www.hr.vcu.edu/media/hr/documents/Separating_Non-Benefited_Employees.pdf for other responsibilities at appointment end.

A postdoctoral scholar may not copy, computerize, export or take any research materials owned by the university without the prior, written permission from his or her faculty mentor and only if such reproduction is permitted under the terms of university policy and applicable grant agreements or other contracts. Any confidential information obtained during a postdoctoral appointment must remain confidential and may be disclosed only in accordance with federal or state law, university policy and the terms of any applicable grant agreement or other contract.

Dispute Resolution

When you have been denied leave or any other postdoctoral benefits, or have other issues of concern related to your postdoctoral appointment you should talk with your department chairperson and/or the Office of Postdoctoral Services. They may be able to assist you in resolve the situation.

Postdoctoral scholars are also eligible to use the services of VCU's Faculty/Staff Ombudsperson. The Ombudsperson provides confidential, informal, impartial, and independent assistance to faculty, staff, and postdoctoral scholars who experience position-related issues or conflicts. The Ombudsperson listens to complaints, provides information, facilitates communication, and helps arrange mediation or conflict resolution between or among members of VCU's faculty, staff, and postdoctoral scholars. Postdoctoral scholars are not entitled to utilize other dispute resolution mechanisms applicable to regular employees or students of VCU.

Forms

[Appointment Letter Templates](#)
[Tuition Scholarship Form](#)
[Health Insurance Forms](#)

Related Documents

Policies

VCU Policy: [VCU Code of Conduct](#)

VCU Policy: [Sexual Misconduct/Violence and Sex/Gender Discrimination](#)

VCU Policy: [Virginia Commonwealth University Rules and Procedures](#)

VCU Policy: [NSF and NIH Responsible Conduct of Research \(RCR\) Training Requirements](#)

[VCU Policies Relevant to Research](#)

[VCU IRB Written Policies and Procedures](#)

Other Related Documents

[VCU Postdoctoral Webpage](#)

[OMB Clarifies Guidance on the Dual Role of Student and Postdoctoral Researchers](#)

[Postdoctoral Health Insurance](#)

[Family and Medical Leave](#)

[Tuition Assistance/Scholarship Information](#)

[Responsible Conduct in Research](#)

[Ombudsperson Services](#)

[Appointment Letter Guidelines](#)

[Immigration Services](#)

[Postdoctoral Salary Guidelines](#)

[Evaluation of Postdoctoral Scholars](#)

Fair Labor Standards Act <https://www.dol.gov/whd/regs/statutes/fairlaborstandact.pdf>

Revision History

This policy supersedes the following archived policies:

March 06, 2014	<i>Postdoctoral Scholars Policy and Procedures (local policy)</i>
March 31, 2008	<i>Postdoctoral Scholars Policy and Procedures (local policy)</i>
July 24, 2007	<i>Postdoctoral Scholars Policy and Procedures (approved as a local policy)</i>

FAQs

There are no FAQs associated with this policy and procedures.