Office of Research
UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

Policy for Postdoctoral Appointments

Effective July 1, 2008 (Revised March 2022)

At the University of Georgia (UGA), the postdoctoral research experience emphasizes scholarship and continued research training for individuals who have recently completed a doctoral degree. The postdoctoral scholar conducts research under the general oversight of a faculty mentor in preparation for a career position in academe, industry, government, or the nonprofit sector. Postdoctoral research work provides essential experience and training that may include opportunities to enhance teaching and other professional skills. Postdoctoral appointees who contribute significantly to the formal instructional mission of UGA may be appointed, with final approval by the Provost, to positions carrying a title that formally recognizes the joint research and teaching expectations.

Postdoctoral appointees contribute to the academic community by enhancing the research and education programs of the university. They bring expertise, insights and creativity that enrich the research and educational environment for all members of the university community, including graduate and undergraduate students. The university strives to provide a stimulating, positive, and constructive experience for the postdoctoral appointee, by emphasizing the shared commitment and responsibility of the institution, the faculty, and the scholar.

This policy defines terms and conditions related to postdoctoral appointments at the University of Georgia. Additionally, postdoctoral appointees are subject to all other applicable UGA and University System of Georgia (USG) policies and procedures. Exceptions to this policy are expected to be rare and granted only in cases with strong justification. Requests for exceptions should be submitted to the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs within the Office of Research. The Office of Postdoctoral Affairs is responsible for administering the postdoctoral appointee policy, periodically reviewing the policy for revisions as needed, and taking active steps to encourage compliance with the policy.

Definition

The definition of postdoctoral appointee used by UGA includes the following criteria:[1]

- The appointee has received a Ph.D. or equivalent doctorate (e.g., D.V.M., Sc.D., M.D., PharmD), usually recently, in a field directly related to the appointee's assigned responsibilities; and
- the assigned responsibilities of the appointee are predominantly research and/or scholarship but may combine these responsibilities with significant (no more than 50%) formal instructional responsibilities; and
- the appointment is full time, limited term; and
- the appointment is viewed as preparatory for a full-time career in academia, industry, government or the non-profit sector.

[1] Based on the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology definition of postdoctoral fellows

UGA has three categories of postdoctoral appointees: positions that are employees of the university with solely research related responsibilities; positions that are employees of the university with both research related and official teaching responsibilities; and positions that are not employees of the university and can have either solely research related or research and official teaching responsibilities. (See the summary table on page 6 for details.)

Postdoctoral Associate AD - research only (BCAT 471) and Postdoctoral Associate AC - research and teaching (BCAT 206) positions are usually funded from UGA-administered grants or contracts and are considered employees of the University, receiving a salary for required services. They are in training as they perform work on a funded project, so they are also considered employees. This enables the University to provide essential services and benefits. Appointment as a Postdoctoral Associate AC – research and teaching (BCAT 206) includes a significant set of responsibilities in formal instruction as Instructor of Record.

Postdoctoral Fellows (BCAT 671) are provided a stipend for which *no service is required*. This stipend is provided directly to the recipient from an external source either through UGA (e.g., a federal training grant or postdoc fellowship) or directly from an external source.

A summary table comparing the details of each appointment type is provided on page 6. In this document, the term “postdoctoral appointee” or “postdoctoral appointment” applies to all categories of appointees.

Expectations

Postdoctoral appointee
The University has adopted the following set of expectations of postdoctoral appointees:

1. conscientious discharge of assigned duties;
2. adherence to ethical standards, which, prior to assuming duties, includes a background investigation;
3. compliance with good laboratory practices and recognized university standards, and timely completion of UGA required lab safety training programs;
4. open and timely discussion with the mentor regarding research progress, distribution of reagents or materials, or any disclosure of findings or techniques privately or in publications;
5. for postdoctoral research & teaching appointees, active participation in training and assessment activities related to formal instructional responsibilities;
6. publication of research or scholarship during the period of the appointment, in consultation with his or her mentor;
7. collegial conduct toward coworkers; and
8. compliance with all sponsor, UGA, and USG policies and procedures, including observation of established guidelines for research involving biohazards, human subjects, or animals.

Mentor
The postdoctoral appointee should be supervised by a mentor who is a faculty member in the unit to which the appointee is assigned. Faculty mentors are responsible for guiding and monitoring the work and advancing the training of postdoctoral appointees. At the time employment or training begins, faculty mentors should provide the postdoctoral appointee with a written description of assigned duties and expectations together with a description of the goals and objectives of the training program. Faculty

mentors should regularly and frequently communicate with appointees, provide regular and timely assessments of performance at least annually, and provide career advice and job placement assistance.

Term of Appointment

5 year maximum: The maximum term of appointment for a postdoctoral appointee is five years. This limit is based on federal guidelines and the tenet that postdoctoral appointments are primarily for training, which has a naturally limited duration. The term of appointment is the **total, cumulative** appointment as a postdoctoral appointee at UGA and does not include time spent as an undergraduate or graduate student or as a postdoctoral appointee at other institutions. However, strong justification will be required if five years at UGA exceeds ten total years of postdoctoral training.

Open- vs. defined-term appointments: Postdoctoral appointees may be appointed under two possible term commitment tracks, and research mentors should consider carefully which track is most appropriate.

Open-term: Postdoctoral appointees may be appointed with no specified end date if there is high likelihood of a long-term project and ongoing funding for the duration of the 5-year maximum postdoctoral term. Postdoctoral appointees with an open-term appointment and no formal end date are entitled to 90 days' advance written notice if the position is ending due to loss of funding, and the separation may be subject to Reduction In Force (RIF) policies if the position was funded by state funds. However, the RIF process and 90-day notice period are not necessary if the position ends due to reaching the 5-year maximum term.

Defined-term: Postdoctoral appointees may be appointed for a limited term with a clearly specified end date if their appointment is based on a short-term project and/or limited funding. The end date must be clearly stated in the offer letter, and separation at that date does not require additional notice. A continuation letter with an updated firm end date is required to continue in a defined-term position beyond the original end date (see Continuation of Defined-term Appointments below).

Exceptions: Periods of extended medical or family leave do not count toward the term of appointment, so long as timely notice is given to the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs. Other exceptions to the five-year term limit will be considered by Office of Postdoctoral Affairs; these are expected to be rare, are restricted to up to one additional year, and will be approved only in cases with strong justification based on the need to complete additional training and not to complete additional work.

Appointment Procedures

The unit in which a postdoctoral appointee is appointed is responsible for ensuring that appropriate procedures are followed and complete files are established at the time of appointment.

- Once proper unit approval to hire a postdoctoral appointee has been obtained, the research mentor has the option to conduct a search. Advertising the position and conducting a search is optional. Individual unit approval procedures may vary, so prospective mentors should check with their unit's administrative or business office.
- A list of duties and responsibilities must be included in the position description.
- Prior to presenting an offer letter to a postdoctoral candidate, units must submit a draft offer letter to the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs via email to opa@uga.edu. Template offer letters for

both open-term and defined-term appointments can be found here and must be used when drafting the offer letter.
- The UGAJobs hiring proposal for postdoctoral positions requires appointment documents. The appointment documents should include the hiring proposal cover form and the additional items listed on this cover form.
- Detailed guidance on processing postdoctoral appointments in UGAJobs, along with other postdoctoral position guidance and FAQs, can be found here.

Continuation of Defined-term Appointments

In order for a postdoctoral appointee to continue in a defined-term position beyond the offer letter end date, a written continuation offer must be presented to the postdoc and the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs with an updated defined end date. If a postdoctoral appointee continues in the position beyond the stated end date without a continuation offer, then the postdoctoral appointment automatically transitions to the open-term appointment (described above), and the postdoctoral appointee then can only be terminated with advance written notice per the procedure below (See Termination of Appointment).

Termination of Appointment

All postdoctoral positions are subject to the standard 180-day probationary period defined for classified staff, as described on the Vice President for Finance and Administration Policies and Procedures webpage.

All postdoctoral appointees are subject to termination without advance notice in cases where ethical or compliance standards have been violated.

In the rare case that a postdoctoral appointee fails to adhere to the general postdoc expectations described above or does not satisfactorily meet the specific duties and responsibilities described in the offer letter, these issues should be documented in a warning letter provided to the postdoctoral appointee. If after a sufficient time and reasonable opportunity have been given to the postdoctoral associate to correct the identified issues, then a termination notice may be sent to the postdoctoral appointee. The termination notice must give at least two weeks' advance notice ahead of the termination date, which must be identified in the notice.

If an open-term appointment is ending for reasons other than the postdoc's job performance, such as loss of funding or a change in project needs, then **termination of the open-term appointment** requires 90-days' advance written notice to the postdoctoral appointee. State-funded positions may be subject to RIF policies; units should contact central HR to determine if this and other policies apply. Termination of open-term postdoctoral appointees when the 5 year maximum term limit is reached does not require further documentation or notice.

Termination of a defined-term postdoctoral appointment at an end date that has been clearly defined in the offer letter or a continuation letter does not require further documentation or notice.

If a postdoc appointee holds a UGA visa sponsorship, the UGA Office of International Education must be contacted *prior* to informing the postdoc of termination.

Evaluation

Recognizing that postdoctoral appointees are in growth positions and striving for professional advancement, they are entitled to formal evaluations by their faculty mentors and this process is strongly encouraged by the University. In accordance with University policy, evaluations must occur on at least annually, with an effort to link evaluations to annual stipend or salary raises when feasible based on funding.

Written evaluations, appropriately customized for the context, are strongly encouraged so that these form the basis of continuing conversations and future evaluations.

Compensation

Effective December 1, 2016, Postdoctoral Associates must be compensated a minimum annual salary of $47,476. Training grants and fellowships administered through UGA must include a minimum stipend of $47,476/year for Postdoctoral Fellows.

The terms of the award will dictate stipend amount and any increases for Postdoctoral Fellows on fellowships not administered through UGA; these are outside the jurisdiction of the University of Georgia. However, Office of Research strongly suggests adherence to the required minimum stipend of $47,476 for all postdoc appointees. In cases where the fellow adjunct stipend amount is less than this minimum, Office of Research expects the appointing unit to provide the difference.

In some disciplines, external funding agencies provide salary guidance that suggests higher minimum stipends and in those cases, our recommendation follows that guidance (e.g., in the biological sciences, the National Institutes of Health publishes guidelines).

Leave

Postdoctoral Associates are eligible for 10 hours per month of paid annual leave (unless on academic payroll) and 8 hours per month of sick leave. There is no provision for leave payout upon separation. Other aspects of the leave policy are the same as for all employees.

Health Insurance

Postdoctoral Associates participate in UGA employee health insurance, subject to HR policies, whereas Postdoctoral Fellows are not considered employees and currently may acquire their own private health insurance or may choose to participate in the individual health insurance plan offered to UGA graduate students.

Retirement Program

Postdoctoral Associates have the option of participating either in the Teachers Retirement System (TRS) of Georgia or an Optional Retirement Plan (ORP). Postdoctoral Fellows can use institutional administrative allowance funds to make voluntary payments into other individually selected retirement plans only when sponsors allow such expenditures. No institutional retirement contributions can be made. No institutional administrative allowance funds in a UGA restricted account can be transferred to a Fellow's retirement account without verification that the sponsor permits such payments from such

funds. Verification must be provided through Sponsored Projects Administration (SPA) before transfers can take place.

Other Benefits

International postdoctoral appointees should check with the University's Immigration Services (http://international.uga.edu/issis) for assistance with questions regarding other fringe benefits and how they will be treated under federal law (i.e., social security, etc.).

For Postdoctoral Fellows, the institutional administrative allowance provided by the sponsor may be used by the appointment unit to support allowable benefits-related expenses. Refer to the award terms and conditions. Expenses not covered by this institutional allowance are the responsibility of the appointment unit. Contact Office of Research for potential matching of unit funds when this institutional support from the sponsor is inadequate to cover these fringe benefits.

Check the summary table comparing details of appointment types provided at the end of this policy.

Grievance

Postdoctoral Associates have access to the same grievance policy as regular employees. Please refer to the following links:

Policy: https://hr.uga.edu/employees/workplace-concerns/uga-grievance-disciplinary-review/
Dispute Resolution Policy: https://hr.uga.edu/employees/workplace-concerns/uga-dispute-resolution-process/

See next page for a summary table of the position details.

Summary Table of Postdoctoral Research Position Details

	Postdoctoral Associate AD	Postdoctoral Associate AC	Postdoctoral Fellow
BCAT OneUSG Connect Job Code	471	206	671
Description	Employee; research duties only	Employee; includes both research duties and teaching as Instructor of Record	Fellowship or traineeship administered through UGA **or** Fellowship not administered through UGA
Term of Appointment	5 years max	5 years max	5 years max
Compensation	Salary	Salary	Stipend
Required Minimum	$47,476 (100% EFT)	$47,476 (100% EFT)	See note below*
Income Tax Owed	Yes	Yes	Yes
Income Tax Withheld	Yes	Yes	No
UGA MyID	Required	Required	Required
UGA Card	Required	Required	Required
UGA Parking Eligible	Yes	Yes	Yes
UGA Services	Yes	Yes	Yes
Background Investigation	Required	Required	Required
Right-to-Know Training	Required	Required	Required
Laboratory Safety Training	Required	Required	Required
Retirement Benefits	TRS or ORP (with employer match)	TRS or ORP (with employer match)	_____
Health Insurance	Employee	Employee	Individual Insurance Offered
Annual Leave	10 hours/month	10 hours/month (unless on academic payroll)	_____
Sick Leave	8 hours/month	8 hours/month	_____

*Postdoctoral Fellow Required Minimum:
If fellowship or traineeship administered through UGA - $47,476.
If fellowship not administered through UGA – Set by sponsor with supplement by unit if under minimum.