

## Postdoctoral Scholars Policy

### Section 1. Introduction

The University of Southern California recognizes the importance of assisting Postdoctoral Scholars who are developing into independent investigators. It is increasingly important to extend the research of junior scholars who have completed their doctoral degrees (Ph.D., Sc.D., M.D., D.D.S. and equivalent doctorates), are preparing for full-time academic or research careers, and wish to broaden their research under the guidance of senior scholars in their field. USC welcomes Postdoctoral Scholars who wish to perform their research in collaboration with senior scholars on the faculty of this University and encourages its faculty to advise, mentor and assist these developing scholars.

### Section 2. Definition

A Postdoctoral Scholar (Postdoctoral Fellow or Postdoctoral Research Associate) is a trainee in residence at the University pursuing advanced study beyond a doctorate in preparation for a full-time academic and/or research career. To be considered for appointment as a Postdoctoral Scholar at the University of Southern California, the individual must qualify as either a Postdoctoral Research Associate or a Postdoctoral Fellow. The Postdoctoral Research Associate is appointed as a temporary, fixed-term employee of the University. The Postdoctoral Fellow is registered as a non-matriculated, non-degree seeking, and limited status student of the University.

A Postdoctoral Scholar must have been awarded a Ph.D. or equivalent doctorate in an appropriate field within the previous three years. The appointment involves substantially full-time research or scholarship (and sometimes teaching), and the appointment is viewed as preparatory for a full-time academic and/or research career. The appointment is not part of any clinical (patient care) training program and the appointee works under the oversight of a senior scholar who is the faculty mentor, or oversight by the department in the University. 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.

Current research assistants, research associates, research fellows, and postdoctoral fellows, if they meet the Postdoctoral Research Associate definition, should hereafter be reappointed under this policy, and designated Postdoctoral Research Associates. Current Sample Fellows will be reappointed Postdoctoral Fellows under the terms of the Postdoctoral Scholars Policy. The University category Research Associate is reserved for long-term, career employees who hold a Ph.D. or equivalent doctorate.

### **Section 3. Title and Benefits**

Postdoctoral Research Associates are a category of visiting scholars seeking to further their educational and professional development and who meet the above definition. Postdoctoral Research Associates may be in residence at the University for a period not to exceed five years. All Postdoctoral Research Associates appointed at the University must be issued a University letter that sets forth the terms of the appointment. Postdoctoral Research Associates will be eligible for benefits provided University exempt staff employees, with the exception of tuition assistance benefits. Since Postdoctoral Research Associates are not faculty members, they do not accrue eligibility toward sabbatical leave. Postdoctoral Research Associates may be supported on research projects or grants.

Postdoctoral Fellows are a category of visitors seeking to further their educational and professional development and who meet the above definition. Postdoctoral Fellows must be registered as non-matriculated, non-degree seeking students while in residence as Postdoctoral Fellows at the University. Postdoctoral Fellows may be in residence at the University for a period not to exceed five years. All Postdoctoral Fellows appointed at the University must be issued a University offer letter that sets forth the terms of the appointment. Postdoctoral Fellows will be eligible for benefits provided University students. As a part of their financial support, the Postdoctoral Fellow will receive sponsored USC Student Health Center Care and USC Student Health Insurance paid for by the sponsoring USC academic department. Postdoctoral Fellows are supported on external training grants, or with USC or external stipends.

A Postdoctoral Scholar's financial support provided by external agencies, whether or not called a fellowship, is to be confirmed by the department at the time of the appointment and considered part of the Postdoctoral Scholar's total financial support. An appointment is always subject to the conditions of the agency or organization making the award. When permitted by an external agency's award, Postdoctoral Fellows may, in accordance with University policies be appointed as either a Postdoctoral Fellow Teaching Associate or a Postdoctoral Fellow Research Assistant in order to supplement their external training grant or stipend award.

When employed by the University to teach or work on a research project or grant, University policies applicable to employees must be followed.

### **Section 4. Privileges and Obligations of Postdoctoral Scholars**

As employees of the University, Postdoctoral Research Associates are eligible to use the University's research facilities and offices that are assigned by the faculty mentor or the department. As registered students of the University, Postdoctoral Fellows have equivalent eligibility.

Postdoctoral Research Associates are eligible to serve as Co-principal Investigators on grant applications, but may not be Principal Investigators unless a specific waiver and approval is

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granted upon recommendation by the department and approval of the appropriate dean of the school.

Postdoctoral Scholars have the obligation to abide by the University's policies. Updated and current policies are posted on the University's Web page at <http://www.usc.edu/policies>, including those defining intellectual property rights, as modified from time to time.

Failure of a Postdoctoral Research Associate to abide by the policies and regulations of the University or the school are grounds for discipline, and may result in termination or dismissal. Failure of a Postdoctoral Fellow to abide by the policies and regulations of the University or the school are grounds for discipline, and may result in discontinuance of the Postdoctoral Fellow appointment.

Postdoctoral Scholars are encouraged and expected to publish the results of their research during the period of their appointment at USC. Faculty mentors are expected to encourage and support the publications in a way that is beneficial to Postdoctoral Scholar's professional development.

A Postdoctoral Scholar's primary role is research, but in unusual cases a limited amount of teaching may be appropriate, e.g., as part of preparation for an academic career, if the individual does not have sufficient prior teaching experience. A Postdoctoral Scholar may not teach more than four courses while at USC unless special permission is obtained from the Provost and may never teach more than one course in a semester. If a Postdoctoral Fellow teaches, it will be with a title of "Teaching Associate" and only as permitted under the terms of the external award.

## **Section 5. Appointment**

Postdoctoral Scholar appointments are to be for a fixed-term. Postdoctoral Research Associate appointments are one-year renewable appointments. Postdoctoral Fellow appointments are for a minimum period of six months. Postdoctoral Research Associates and Postdoctoral Fellows will be granted a fixed-term appointment letter covering the terms of the appointment, signed by the dean of the school. The fixed-term, letter of appointment can be renewed up to a maximum of five, one-year appointments on the recommendation of the faculty mentor and at the discretion of the dean. There is no obligation to renew an appointment, which is discretionary with the University. Cumulatively, all the appointments for a Postdoctoral Research Associate or Fellow should never exceed five years, unless approved in advance by the Provost. Faculty mentors are encouraged to give Postdoctoral Research Associates and Fellows a minimum of sixty days notice if they do not intend to recommend renewal of appointments, but whether or not such notice is given, the appointment ends on the designated date or on June 30 if no date is designated. In addition, appointments may be prematurely terminated without cause at the discretion of the dean of the school, after consultation with the mentor, on ninety days notice.

The school dean must sign the appointment offer letter. The appointment letter must be countersigned by the Postdoctoral Research Associate or Postdoctoral Fellow, received by the

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school, and filed with the Postdoctoral Office and University Payroll Services prior to the initiation of the appointment. The appointment letter is to include the following:

The laboratory, institute, department or school inviting the Postdoctoral Scholar to visit;

The faculty member who will serve as the mentor;

The term of the appointment, with starting and ending dates;

The expectation that the Postdoctoral Research Associate or Postdoctoral Fellow will be involved in essentially full-time research or scholarship;

The University's restrictions on the length of appointment;

The source of funding, if any, to support the Postdoctoral Scholar's research;

Whether the Postdoctoral Research Associate or Postdoctoral Fellow appointment will end at the conclusion of a particular externally funded fellowship or grant;

The Postdoctoral Research Associate's monthly salary and benefits;

A statement that a Postdoctoral appointment is subject to University policies, including the policy defining Intellectual Property rights.

Confidentiality statement;

A specific request that Postdoctoral provide a copy of their doctoral diploma or other certification that indicates that the terminal degree has been completed satisfactorily.

A statement that a Postdoctoral Scholar will be required to verify their eligibility to work or study in the United States;

Arbitration Agreement for the Postdoctoral Research Associate;

At-Will Employment Agreement for Postdoctoral Research Associate.

If the doctoral candidate has not yet obtained a degree, she or he should provide evidence that a thesis has been approved together with a documented indication of the expected date of formal graduation. It is the responsibility of the faculty mentor to verify this documentation. The documentation is to be filed with the Postdoctoral Office.

Departments must contact the Office of International Services early in the recruitment process when it becomes evident that a candidate for a Postdoctoral Scholar appointment is not a citizen

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or permanent resident of the United States. The process of obtaining necessary governmental approval must begin prior to an offer of appointment being made. No appointment offer to a foreign national may be made without the approval of the Office of International Services. The office will advise departments of the appropriate steps which need to be taken, assist in the completion of procedures, and provide legal services when necessary.

Appointments of Postdoctoral Scholars must be in full compliance with federal and state laws and University policy on equal opportunity. The University will maintain a standing notice of the opportunity for appointment as a Postdoctoral Research Associate or Fellow, and will refer all applicants to the appropriate department.

Attached are templates of offer letters for appointment as a Postdoctoral Research Associate or Fellow. Deans who wish to deviate from this template should check with the University Office of the General Counsel.

## **Section 6. Faculty Responsibilities**

Faculty mentors should treat Postdoctoral Scholars as professional colleagues who are launching their research careers and may soon seek appointment as assistant professors or full-time researcher scholars. Mentors should orient Postdoctoral Research Associates and Fellows to the University's research policies and, in particular, should discuss in detail the implications of the Policies on the Conflicts of Interest and the Policy on Intellectual Property.

Faculty mentors also have a responsibility to provide career advice and encouragement. The Office of Career Planning and Placement will provide advice to Postdoctoral Research Associates and Fellows on employment opportunities; however, it is not the responsibility of the University to insure that Postdoctoral Research Associates and Fellows obtain permanent positions upon completion of their term of appointment.

## **Section 7. University Responsibilities**

Deans are responsible to the Provost for monitoring the implementation of the Postdoctoral Scholars Policy in their school's departments and institutes. Appointment records for Postdoctoral Research Associates and Postdoctoral Fellows should be entered in the University's Payroll and Benefits System and filed with the Postdoctoral Office. In addition, the appointing school or department is responsible for entering the Postdoctoral Fellow's information into the University's Student Information System. A non-degree program code is used for postdoctoral scholars. The Postdoctoral Fellow is then required to register each semester.

Since both Postdoctoral Fellows and Postdoctoral Research Associates are temporary and not regular positions at the University, national advertising, such as advertising for regular instructional or primary research appointments, is not necessary. A unit searching for a particular category of Postdoctoral Scholar may choose to advertise. The University's policies on

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non-discrimination must be observed and good faith efforts are to be made to include minorities and females in the selection pool. Since these Postdoctoral Scholars are in a temporary training status, they may not be moved to a regular instructional or research position except by consideration during a normal posting and search procedures.

The University may issue certificates of completion to Postdoctoral Research Associates and Postdoctoral Fellows. The Postdoctoral Office will maintain records that will permit the University to remain in contact with postdoctoral alumni.

It is the responsibility of the Office of the Provost to administer this policy and assure consistent application of this policy across the schools of the University.

### **Section 8. Approval**

This policy has been developed to reflect and confirm the University's support and encouragement for the appointment of Postdoctoral Scholars at the University, and to require that those efforts be undertaken in accordance with the University's policies and guidelines. This policy is effective as of the date set forth below. It is the University's intention to review the policy from time to time following its adoption.

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## Appendix 1

### Template Offer Letter for Postdoctoral Research Associate

Dear Dr. [insert name of Postdoctoral Research Associate]:

It is with pleasure that we offer you a Postdoctoral Research Associate appointment at the [insert School name] of the University of Southern California based on the recommendation of [insert name of academic department, laboratory, or institute in which this individual will be appointed] and [insert name of faculty mentor or Chair or Dean, as appropriate] who will be your faculty mentor. This offer of appointment is in accordance with the University's postdoctoral education program to provide an opportunity for recent graduates to further develop their research skills and learn new techniques.

Your monthly [insert: monthly, full-time, salary] for [insert first year of appointment] will be \$[amount 1]. [FOR appointments that include external fellowship or other funding, insert: Of this amount, \$[amount x] will come from departmental funds (if applicable) and \$[amount y] will be paid through the University from external funding provided from [insert description of the funding source]. [\*\*\*\* Amount 1 must be the sum of Amount x plus Amount y]

While your specific responsibilities and duties will be assigned by [insert name of faculty mentor], it is expected that your time will be committed to research and scholarship.

In addition, the School will:

(1)...

(2)...

[List the specific commitments that apply].

Assignments of space, equipment, clerical, and other support are subject to change in the future according to the University's needs.

This is a non-faculty University employment appointment as a Postdoctoral Research Associate. Its period is [Insert: appointment start date] to [Insert: appointment end date][nab. appointment end date must not be more than one year after appointment start date]. You are eligible to be considered for reappointment on a year-to-year basis, but there is no guarantee of reappointment, which is at the University's discretion. The maximum possible term is five years, although generally the period is shorter. Appointments may be prematurely terminated at any time during the year-to-year appointment, without cause, at the discretion of the dean of the school, on ninety days notice or payment to the extent the notice falls short of ninety days. In addition, if the external funding which supports you is no longer available, your appointment will be terminated.

Should you accept this offer, your continued employment will require both satisfactory job performance and compliance with existing and future university and departmental policy. Your

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compliance with university policy includes the responsibility to respect the highest level of privacy for all members of the university community. Because many of our faculty and staff handle a variety of proprietary and private information concerning colleagues, students, patients, alumni, donors, and others associated with the university, protecting privacy is the responsibility of all university employees. Therefore, a further condition of your employment is that you agree to not disclose or discuss any confidential information obtained from the university, school or departmental records, either during or after employment with the university (unless such disclosure is a normal requirement of your position and has been authorized). This includes, but is not limited to, intellectual property, proprietary trade information, student records, patient records and donor files.

At USC Employee Orientation, you will be provided with information about your eligibility for employee benefits, the enrollment process, and the effective dates of coverage. If you currently receive health benefits, you may wish to exercise your COBRA benefit rights until benefits at the University become effective. Your enrollment in benefits programs for which you are eligible must be completed within the first 60 days of your employment or you must wait until the next open enrollment period. You are also eligible to apply to participate in the university child-care program, but the available space may be extremely limited. Your supervisor will schedule you to attend orientation within your first three weeks of employment. You will need to provide certified documentation for any dependents you wish to include in benefits programs. In the meantime, I encourage you to review the University's Strategic Plan and the other Web resources identified below for further information about your employment and the university.

According to university policy, no separation pay (severance pay) or layoff benefits are paid to fixed-term employees. Since your appointment is not a faculty appointment, you do not accrue eligibility toward sabbatical leave. When you leave, your final paycheck will, in accordance with the University's policies, include pay for days worked, and for accrued and unused vacation days. The university does not pay for accrued and unused sick days upon termination. Vacation leaves are in accordance with University policy posted on the University's WEB page at <http://www.usc.edu/policies>.

Prior to beginning your appointment, you must provide documentation to the dean that the relevant terminal degree has been satisfactorily completed. You are also required to verify your eligibility to work in the United States. Please bring with you on your first day of employment the enclosed I-9 form along with documents that will establish your identity and employment eligibility. This offer is contingent upon your agreement that the employment relationship is at-will and your acceptance of an arbitration agreement. Both documents are enclosed for your review.

If the terms specified in this letter are acceptable to you, please sign and return the original of this letter along with the signed arbitration and at-will agreements to me by [insert date]. The appointment terms in this offer letter supplant any previous correspondence and discussions, and

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by signing below, you agree to adhere to all University policies, including those defining intellectual property rights.

We look forward to your association with USC.

Yours truly,

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[Letter must be signed by dean, and may be co-signed by mentor or chair]

I hereby accept employment on the conditions set forth in this letter.

Signature of Candidate

Date

Enclosures:   Arbitration Agreement  
                  At-Will Agreement  
                  I-9 Form and List of Acceptable Documents  
                  [Other Departmental Agreements]

Web Resources:   Strategic Plan [www.usc.edu/admin/provost/strategicplan](http://www.usc.edu/admin/provost/strategicplan)  
                      Employee Benefits [www.usc.edu/Benefits](http://www.usc.edu/Benefits)  
                      Parking [www.usc.edu/dept/transportation/](http://www.usc.edu/dept/transportation/)  
                      Payroll Services [www.usc.edu/payroll/](http://www.usc.edu/payroll/)  
                      University Policies [www.usc.edu/policies/](http://www.usc.edu/policies/)  
                      USC Home Page [www.usc.edu](http://www.usc.edu)  
                      [Department Home Page]

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## Appendix 2

### Template Offer Letter for Postdoctoral Fellow

Dear Dr. [insert name of Postdoctoral Student]:

It is with pleasure that we offer you a Postdoctoral Fellowship appointment at the [insert School name] of the University of Southern California based on the recommendation of [insert name of academic department, laboratory, or institute in which this individual will be appointed] and [insert name of faculty mentor or Chair or Dean, as appropriate] who will be your faculty mentor. This offer of appointment as a Postdoctoral Fellow is in accordance with the University's postdoctoral education program to provide an opportunity for recent graduates to further develop their research skills and learn new techniques.

This is a University post-graduate student appointment as a Postdoctoral Fellow. This requires that each semester you register in a Postdoctoral Study with the Graduate School of the University. The appointment period is [Insert: appointment start date] to [Insert: appointment end date][nab. appointment end date must not be more than one year after appointment start date]. You are eligible to be considered for reappointment on a year-to-year basis, but there is no guarantee of reappointment, which is at the University's discretion. The maximum possible term is five years, although generally the period is shorter. Appointments may be prematurely discontinued at any time during the year-to-year appointment, at the discretion of the dean of the school, on ninety days notice. Unless terminated earlier, the term of your postdoctoral appointment will end if any grant or fellowship supporting you is no longer available.

Your monthly stipend for [insert first year of appointment] will be \$[amount 1]. [FOR appointments that include external fellowship or other funding, insert: Of this amount, \$[amount x] will come from departmental funds (if applicable) and \$[amount y] will be paid through the University from external funding provided from [insert description of the funding source]. [\*\*\*\* Amount 1 must be the sum of Amount x plus Amount y]

While specific responsibilities associated with the appointment will be assigned by [insert name of faculty mentor], it is expected that your time will be committed to research and scholarship [insert if appropriate]

In addition, the School will:

(1)...

(2)...

[List the specific commitments that apply].

Assignments of space, equipment, clerical, and other support are subject to change in the future according to the University's needs.

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You are eligible for all student health services as described at <http://www.usc.edu/uphc> and other benefits provided to University students as described at <http://www.usc.edu/dept/publications/SCAMPUS>, which may be revised from time to time. You are eligible to add dependents on the USC Student Health Insurance at your own expense. You are also eligible to apply to participate in the student childcare program, but the available space may be extremely limited.

Should you accept this offer, your continued appointment as a Postdoctoral Fellow will require both satisfactory performance and compliance with existing and future university and departmental policy. As a post-graduate student and as a member of the University community, you are obligated to abide by University Community and Student Policies. Updated and current policies are posted on the University's Web page at <http://www.usc.edu/policies>, including those defining intellectual property rights, as modified from time to time. I encourage you to review the University's Strategic Plan and other Web resources identified below for further information about the University

Your compliance with university policy includes the responsibility to respect the highest level of privacy for all members of the university community. Because you may handle a variety of proprietary and private information concerning colleagues, students, patients, alumni, donors, and others associated with the university, a further condition of your fellowship appointment is that you agree to not disclose or discuss any confidential information obtained from the university, school or departmental records, either during or after your appointment at the university (unless such disclosure is a normal requirement of your position and has been authorized). This includes, but is not limited to, intellectual property, proprietary trade information, student records, patient records and donor files.

Prior to beginning your appointment, you must provide documentation to the dean that the relevant terminal degree has been satisfactorily completed. [For international fellows insert: You are also required to verify your eligibility to study in the United States. Please bring with you on your first day your J-1 visa immigration documentation indicating your compliance with U.S. Immigration policy and verification of your eligibility to study in the United States.]

If the terms specified in this letter are acceptable to you, please sign and return the original of this letter to me by [insert date]. The appointment terms in this offer letter supplant any previous correspondence and discussions, and by signing below, you agree to adhere to all University policies, including those defining intellectual property rights.

We look forward to your association with USC.

Yours truly,

SSSS

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[Letter must be signed by dean, and may be co-signed by mentor or chair]

I hereby accept this appointment on the conditions set forth in this letter.

Signature of Candidate

Date

Enclosures: List of Acceptable Documents  
[Other Departmental Agreements]

Web Resources: Strategic Plan [www.usc.edu/admin/provost/strategicplan/](http://www.usc.edu/admin/provost/strategicplan/)  
Guidebook for USC Students [www.usc.edu/dept/publications/SCAMPUS/](http://www.usc.edu/dept/publications/SCAMPUS/)  
USC Student Health/USC Student Health Insurance [www.usc.edu/uphc](http://www.usc.edu/uphc)  
Parking [www.usc.edu/dept/transportation/](http://www.usc.edu/dept/transportation/)  
University Policies [www.usc.edu/policies/](http://www.usc.edu/policies/)  
USC Home Page [www.usc.edu](http://www.usc.edu)  
[Department Home Page]

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