

**PPP-65 Postdoctoral Recruitment and Education (Basic and Clinical Sciences)**

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I.	Basic Premise and Objectives for Postdoctoral Training.....	2
II.	Definition of Postdoctoral Research Fellow .....	2
III.	Policies Concerning Postdoctoral Fellows.....	2
IV.	Appointment Status.....	2
V.	Advertisement of Postdoctoral Position.....	3
VI.	Application for a Postdoctoral Position .....	3
VII.	Postdoctoral Review Committee.....	3
VIII.	Approval of Applicant Pool .....	4
IX.	Admission .....	4
X.	Diversity .....	5
XI.	Faculty Responsibilities for Mentoring Postdoctoral Fellows .....	5
XII.	Evaluation of Performance.....	5
XIII.	Guidelines for Submission of Evaluations.....	5
XIV.	Grievance Issues.....	6

## **PPP-65 Postdoctoral Recruitment and Education (Basic and Clinical Sciences)**

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East Tennessee State University recognizes and formalizes the role of postdoctoral fellows in the growth and development of the research enterprise within the University. The policies described in this document are modeled after the system for the appointment and training of medical residents.

### **I. Basic Premise and Objectives for Postdoctoral Training**

Postdoctoral fellows are non-degree seeking trainees who are advancing their post-graduate scientific training in preparation for an independent scientific/scholarly career. For the fellow, the primary goals of postdoctoral training should be an opportunity to further professional preparation, advance their research skills and to be exposed to new ideas under the mentorship of a faculty sponsor. For the faculty sponsor, mentoring postdoctoral fellows should be a unique didactic training experience. For the University, postdoctoral fellows should be a vital part of the growing research enterprise and they should contribute to the intellectual vitality of the academic environment.

### **II. Definition of Postdoctoral Research Fellow**

The following define a postdoctoral research fellow:

- the appointee has recently been awarded a Ph.D. or equivalent doctorate (e.g., Sc.D., M.D., D.V.M.) in an appropriate field; and
- the appointment is short-term, and
- the appointment involves full-time research or scholarship; and
- the appointment is viewed as continued training and preparation for a scientific/academic career;
- the appointee works under the supervision of a faculty member; and
- the appointee is expected to publish the results of his/her research or scholarship, which were obtained during the period of the appointment.

### **III. Policies Concerning Postdoctoral Fellows**

Consistent with the definition above, the postdoctoral appointment is a short-term appointment with a primary purpose of providing additional research or scholarly development and training for a career in science.

The Vice Provost for Research and Sponsored Programs and the Postdoctoral Review Committee have responsibility for monitoring postdoctoral policies to assure consistent application of those policies throughout the University.

### **IV. Appointment Status**

All postdoctoral fellows are appointed on a short-term (annual) basis with the overall intention that a research fellowship should not exceed five years, except under special circumstances to be approved by the faculty sponsor, the department and the Postdoctoral Review Committee (these might include illness, child birth or a need to conclude a project which is at an advanced stage). The first appointment is for a one-year period, with an annual reappointment and new annual employment contract thereafter.

Postdoctoral positions are officially classified as Postdoctoral Assistants, Level 6/8 (title code 3360) under the East Tennessee State University Administrative/Professional Compensation Plan. Compensation is at a special pay rate allowing the use of National Institutes of Health (NIH) or other sponsoring agency pay schedules for the initial hiring salary of new employees (based upon postdoctoral years of experience). Departments with limited funding sources will pay in accordance with

## **PPP-65 Postdoctoral Recruitment and Education (Basic and Clinical Sciences)**

---

the standard university pay scale for Level 6/8. As stated in the employment contract, satisfactory performance and availability of funds determine whether employee salaries will be raised annually in accordance with sponsoring agency pay scales.

Departments requiring extensive longer-term research performed by doctorally prepared employees classify their doctoral employees as Research Associate, Level 6/8 (title code 3916), with the respective standard university pay scale and standard employment contract.

In compliance with Tennessee Board of Regents and university policy, as regular employees, postdoctoral researchers are eligible for full employee benefits, including health insurance and retirement. The state-supported retirement system includes a portable optional retirement program, suitable for researchers on grant funding.

As stated in the employment contract, Postdoctoral Assistants on annual contracts are not eligible for ETSU merit, across the board or equity adjustments.

### **V. Advertisement of Postdoctoral Position**

New postdoctoral research positions are advertised and filled in accordance with the University's search procedures, *PPP-35 Search Guidelines for Filling Faculty, Administrative, and Clerical/Support Vacancies*. Due to the unique nature of the positions, advertising requirements are reduced to two weeks in the recommended sources that are approved in the Recruitment Plan.

### **VI. Application for a Postdoctoral Position**

Application for postdoctoral study is made directly to the advertising faculty sponsor in the academic department involved. Faculty sponsors are expected to respond to all correspondence regarding possible postdoctoral status. The faculty member and the department Chairperson make the determination that the area of interest is appropriate for study at East Tennessee State University, and that whether there is sufficient office/laboratory space, with input from the Postdoctoral Review Committee.

### **VII. Postdoctoral Review Committee**

The Postdoctoral Review Committee serves in an advisory capacity for faculty attempting to recruit qualified postdoctoral fellows. The Committee assists in the postdoctoral review process to insure:

- 1) fair and objective hiring practices are observed, and
- 2) all postdoctoral candidates meet the minimum requirements of the position advertised, i.e., appropriate background, degree, training, etc.

The Committee serves as an advocate for postdoctoral fellows within the University. The Committee's mentoring involves advice and assistance in the development and execution of research projects, education in research protocol issues such as ethics, objectivity and conflicts of interest, and advice and assistance with career opportunities and advancement within science and academia.

The Committee receives and reviews semi-annual evaluations of a fellow's performance and is notified by a faculty sponsor if a fellow will not be reappointed. The Committee also serves in an advisory and review capacity during a grievance process.

The Vice Provost for Research and Sponsored Programs appoints the Committee, in consultation with the Dean of Medicine. The Committee is composed of no fewer than three and no more than five faculty, including a minimum of one committee member representing the general University. The Committee

**PPP-65 Postdoctoral Recruitment and Education (Basic and Clinical Sciences)**

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chair must be a tenured faculty member. The majority of the Committee should be drawn from the tenured faculty. The chair and at least two members of the Committee must have previous experience mentoring postdoctoral fellows within the last five years prior to their appointment. It is recommended that one member of the committee be drawn from the junior faculty, preferably a junior faculty member who had undertaken a postdoctoral appointment no more than five years prior to joining the committee. Committee members will serve a minimum term of three years. At his discretion, the Dean of Medicine may also wish to appoint a departmental chair to serve as a non-voting, ex-officio member of the committee on an annual rotating basis.

**VIII. Approval of Applicant Pool**

In accordance with Tennessee Board of Regents Guidelines, candidates considered to be qualified by the Postdoctoral Review Committee will be nominated to the Special Assistant to the President for Diversity, Affirmative Action/Equal Employment Opportunity via the “Certification of Applicant Pool” procedures. The AA/EEO Office, in recognition of the typical short time frame between the approval of grant funding and the need to get research projects started, will expedite this action.

**IX. Admission**

When a faculty sponsor, sponsoring department, and Postdoctoral Review Committee all agree that it is appropriate for an individual to come to East Tennessee State University as a postdoctoral fellow, a letter is sent to the fellow from the faculty sponsor (or department Chairperson). This letter should contain the following information:

- name of the faculty sponsor with whom the fellow will be training
- the expected arrival/start date
- an understanding of the source, level, and duration of funding
- an understanding that the fellow would work under yearly contract
- details of duties
- health insurance and retirement information
- details regarding vacation, sick leave, and travel reimbursement policy
- a copy of this university policy, *Policies for Postdoctoral Recruitment and Education*

The letter is not an offer of a job. It is a statement of the terms and conditions of the position. The applicant will indicate his/her acceptance of the terms by signing the letter and returning the signed original to the faculty sponsor/mentor. The applicant should keep a copy of the signed letter for his/her files. The fellow is required to submit a copy of his/her diploma or transcript (with translation into English if it is in a foreign language) showing final doctoral degree conferral. If the final degree has not yet been conferred, a statement of completion of studies from the fellow's home institution (Registrar's Office or equivalent) is required for conditional employment. This statement should indicate the date on which all requirements were/will be completed and the expected degree conferral date.

Upon acceptance of the terms and conditions of the position, and University approval of the contract, the applicant will be sent a one-year contract from East Tennessee State University, which includes all of the information described above. Upon signing and acceptance of the contract the Postdoctoral Fellow would be ready to begin their research program at East Tennessee State University.

**PPP-65 Postdoctoral Recruitment and Education (Basic and Clinical Sciences)**

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**X. Diversity**

East Tennessee State University is strongly committed to an affirmative action program for admitting qualified minority applicants for fellowship positions. The University strives to prepare under-represented minority applicants for positions of leadership in all branches of clinical, social, investigative and academic science/medicine. It is our goal to see their representation in academia increased at all levels. Therefore, minority candidates are particularly encouraged to apply. To achieve this goal, the faculty sponsor and the sponsoring department will advertise the position in appropriate minority oriented professional publications as well as contact minority oriented science organizations (such as the NIH Black Scientist Association) to solicit applications from qualified applicants.

**XI. Faculty Responsibilities for Mentoring Postdoctoral Fellows**

In view of the role of the fellow as trainee, the faculty responsibilities are an extension of those provided to other trainees (graduate students, medical students, medical residents), though with a much greater emphasis on the development of scientific independence. Mentoring will involve detailed advice and assistance in the development and execution of a specific research project, but in addition mentoring will include education in research protocol issues such as ethics, objectivity and conflicts of interest. In addition, the faculty sponsor/mentor is expected to assist and advise the fellow with regard to career opportunities and advancement within science and academia.

**XII. Evaluation of Performance**

Annual reappointment and salary level are determined by recommendation of the sponsor/mentor and the Postdoctoral Review Committee. Salary levels for postdoctoral fellows are consistent with those promulgated by the National Institutes of Health guidelines. In the case of extramural funding, it is recognized that annual salary level for fellows may be subject to and dependent upon the salary line provided/recommended by the funding agency.

The faculty sponsor/mentor will provide at least two semi-annual evaluations of the fellow's performance. This evaluation will be used by the Postdoctoral Review Committee to recommend the fellow's promotion into the next year of training. Evaluations are particularly important if the fellow's performance has been unacceptable. To eliminate ambiguities and misunderstandings, it is especially important for the sponsor/mentor to outline, in writing, all expected performance benchmarks to the fellow at the beginning of the appointment. This should include the fellow's specific responsibilities within the laboratory as well as laboratory requirements for: 1.) authorship, 2.) determining priority of research projects; 3.) ownership of projects; 4.) ownership of data; 5.) patent rights; and 6.) policy for the fellow taking projects with him/her when the fellow leaves the laboratory.

Fellows who are not to be re-appointed must be notified in writing by their sponsor/mentor and given reasonable time (at least three months advance warning) in order to arrange alternative plans. The Postdoctoral Review Committee and the Department Chair will also be informed and will receive a copy of the letter given to the fellow by the faculty sponsor of his/her decision not to reappoint the fellow. The reasons for not re-appointing the fellow must be clearly delineated in the letter, i.e. loss of funding, poor performance, poor scholarship, etc.

**XIII. Guidelines for Submission of Evaluations**

The faculty sponsor/mentor will provide the Office of Human Resources with copies of all semi-annual

**PPP-65 Postdoctoral Recruitment and Education (Basic and Clinical Sciences)**

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postdoctoral employee evaluations for inclusion in the employee's official personnel file. Annual reappointment and salary level are determined by recommendation of the sponsor/mentor and the Postdoctoral Review Committee, and must be submitted to the Office of Human Resources for processing and filing in the employee's official personnel file. The *Annual Reappointment and Salary Level for Postdoctoral Fellow Form* (available in the Human Resources Document and Form webpage) will be used to submit annual reappointments 60 days prior to the fellow's anniversary/hire date.

**XIV. Grievance Issues**

In the event that a postdoctoral fellow believes that he/she has suffered a grievance which might negatively impact their career, they should follow the procedure described below to have the grievance investigated and if proven, to provide a means of rectification. First, the fellow should discuss the issue with his/her sponsor and solicit advice. If the issue of contention involves the sponsor/mentor, the fellow should contact the Department Chair and the Postdoctoral Review Committee. If the Department Chair and/or the Postdoctoral Review Committee feel that sufficient cause is present, the fellow will be asked to submit a written account of the grievance. The fellow may request that the Postdoctoral Review Committee recommend how to deal with the issue(s).

In the event of allegations of scientific misconduct it is recommended that the University policies on investigating such allegations be followed. In this case the Department Chair and/or the Postdoctoral Review Committee would contact the University's Vice Provost for Research and Sponsored Programs who is responsible for conducting such investigations.

**NOTE:** ETSU employs only U.S. citizens and aliens authorized to work in the United States. Recommended candidates must present prior to employment the required documents, as listed on an official ETSU employment application, for employment in the United States. Contact the Office of Human Resources for additional information.