Policy Guidelines for Postdoctoral Fellows at Thomas Jefferson University
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Introduction

Postdoctoral fellows at Thomas Jefferson University (TJU), as at other institutions, comprise a significant population within our research and training programs. Organizations, such as the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), the National Academy of Sciences (NAS), the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology (FASEB) and the National Postdoctoral Association (NPA), have identified a number of issues surrounding the status of postdoctoral fellows at academic and other institutions. Given the increasing attention to these issues from outside agencies and the significant role of postdoctoral fellows at Jefferson, the present policy was established to provide guidance in the governance of matters related to postdoctoral training.

In particular, AAMC recommendations regarding postdoctoral fellows support the establishment of policies and procedures that:

1. Identify a central university office for administration of postdoctoral fellows
2. Recognize the position as a training appointment
3. Establish uniform core policies on recruitment and appointments, including stipends, benefits, rights and responsibilities, and mentoring
4. Draft and provide a standard letter of appointment
5. Establish uniform term limits for appointments
6. Provide support and career advisement
7. Provide for periodic review and amendment

The Board of Trustees of TJU has identified the Jefferson College of Life Sciences (JCLS or the College) as the central administrative location for the handling of postdoctoral affairs and charged the College with the development of relevant policies. The goal of the following policy is to address these issues in a fashion that provides mutual benefits to TJU, postdoctoral faculty advisors, and postdoctoral fellows, in order to ensure a positive training environment that will attract the highest quality postdoctoral fellows to engage in career development and training in research laboratories at Jefferson. Development of this policy is a continuing process involving the Jefferson administration, faculty and the postdoctoral fellow community.

Definition of a Postdoctoral Fellow

A postdoctoral fellow is an individual who has received a doctoral degree, other terminal degree or equivalent working in a term-limited position of mentored research and professional development to prepare for an independent career (https://acd.od.nih.gov/documents/presentations/12152023_Postdoc_Working_Group_Report.pdf, page 23). The purpose of postdoctoral training is to receive additional preparation for an academic,

industrial, government or other career requiring advanced research training. Postdoctoral fellows are expected to be engaged in full-time research under the mentorship of a member of the Jefferson faculty.

Appointment of Postdoctoral Fellows

As temporary training appointments, the position of postdoctoral fellow may be held for a period of no more than five years. Under exceptional circumstances, when additional training is deemed appropriate, this period may be extended for two additional years (total of seven) with written justification provided to the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs. This total includes all research training past the terminal degree whether obtained at Jefferson or at another institution(s). Although research careers entail life-long learning, individuals past the five-year mark are no longer to be considered to be in training and should be moved into another career track position whether remaining at Jefferson or moving to another institution. The initial offer letter for a postdoctoral fellow should contain or be accompanied by documentation providing the following information:

- Stipend level
- Issues related to future renewal of funding and contingency of this position on that funding
- Benefits package (as per TJU Human Resources)
- Expectations and obligations of the position (as per description of project by PI and as per TJU compliance policies)

The hiring process should follow standard personnel procedures established by the TJU Human Resources Department, which will assist departments in the hiring process.

Office of Postdoctoral Affairs

The Office of the Dean of JCLS shall include the function of an Office of Postdoctoral Affairs utilizing appropriate existing personnel, or new personnel as required, to administer this function. The College shall also establish an ad hoc faculty committee called the Advisory Committee for Postdoctoral Training to assist in these matters. The College will endeavor, in conjunction with academic departments and training grant directors, to determine human resource needs and training opportunities for postdoctoral fellows at TJU. The Office of Postdoctoral Affairs shall also work in cooperation with the appropriate university offices to ensure participation of postdoctoral fellows in all relevant compliance programs, especially those related to the Responsible Conduct of Research. Insofar as many postdoctoral fellows are citizens of other countries, the Office shall work closely with the Office of International Services to provide support for international fellows.

Jefferson Postdoctoral Association

The College shall establish and provide support for a self-directing, but institutionally supported, Jefferson Postdoctoral Association (JPA), modeled after the successful JCLS Graduate Student Association and other external postdoctoral associations. The purpose of the JPA shall be to promote academic, social, and career guidance programs for postdoctoral fellows at Jefferson. The Office of Postdoctoral Affairs and JPA shall work together to provide a focus for training in survival skills and career guidance, to encourage good mentoring practices, and to build on pre-existing programs for faculty and students such as compliance training, career forums, and workshops dealing with grantsmanship, scientific writing, and speaking. These objectives are designed to ensure compliance with NIH and other internal and external policies pertaining to the Responsible Conduct of Research and to enhance the career skills of postdoctoral fellows in these areas.

Vacation, Holidays, and Sick Leave Benefits

Postdoctoral fellows are not eligible for traditional permanent staff benefits, including Earned Time Off (ETO). However, the following policy applies to all postdoctoral fellows at TJU, regardless of their source of funding.

Vacation Leave. Vacation days are allotted at ten days per year, starting on date of hire. If postdocs start at any time other than July 1, this allotment will be pro-rated. Postdocs may carry over up to five days for a maximum of fifteen days (three weeks) at any one time. There is no accrual or payout of unused vacation days at time of termination.

Holidays. Holidays include the seven designated by Jefferson (New Year's Day (January 1), Martin Luther King Jr. Day (3rd Monday of January), Memorial Day (last Monday in May), Independence Day (July 4), Labor Day (1st Monday of September), Thanksgiving Day (4th Thursday of November), and Christmas (December 25)).

Sick Leave. Sick leave is allotted at five days per year, after 60 days of service. If postdocs start at any time other than July 1, this allotment will be pro-rated. Health-related absences beyond this allotment (including maternity leave) are covered under short-term disability benefits. There is no accrual or payout of unused sick days at time of termination.

Postdoctoral fellows receiving funding from external sources, such as government or foundation grants, are further subject to the benefits and restrictions established by the funding source, commensurate with policies for comparable training positions at Jefferson.

Health and Related Benefits

All full-time postdoctoral fellows, regardless of their funding source, shall be eligible for TJU benefits (effective 1/1/2004 for NIH NRSA Fellows) from the date of hire (unless indicated otherwise below) including:

- Health insurance
- Prescription drug coverage
- Dental insurance
- Vision coverage
- Basic and supplemental life insurance for the postdoc, spouse and children
- Accidental death and dismemberment insurance for the postdoc, spouse and children
- Business travel accident insurance
- Short-term disability (maternity leave is covered under this)
- Long-term disability
- Employee flexible spending account
- Jefferson Defined Contribution Retirement Plan (403b)
- Tuition assistance (internal and external)

Compensation

Compensation of postdoctoral fellows at TJU shall be subject to annual review and revision as required. The minimum compensation for newly hired and current postdoctoral fellows, who are not funded by an NIH NRSA individual or institutional training grant (Postdoctoral Fellow in Training) or

other extramural funding source, beginning June 28, 2026, is $64,723. Fellows funded by an NIH NRSA individual or institutional training grant (Postdoctoral Fellow in Training) or another extramural funding source shall be compensated at that organization's stipend scale. Fellows that are on an H1B visa should contact TJU's Office of International Services for more information. Jefferson has salary ranges based upon years of experience, which are highly recommended when funding allows, but are not required. For potential postdoctoral appointees whose skills and experience indicate their compensation falls outside of these ranges, TJU Human Resources Department, Compensation, in cooperation with the Principal Investigator, hiring department and the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs, shall assist in determining whether there is justification for an exception to these scales, or in determining whether another job code and pertaining scale is more appropriate to the appointee.