The UTHSC Compact
Commitments and Work Conditions for Postdoctoral Fellows at UTHSC

The following document is a modified version of the “Compact Between Postdoctoral Fellows and Their Mentors” drafted by the AAMC Graduate Research Education and Training (GREAT) group. Modifications were done to facilitate its specific application to Postdoctoral Fellows and Mentors at the University of Tennessee Health Science Center (UTHSC).

Postdoctoral fellows are individuals who typically come to UTHSC to further their training in a chosen discipline after recently obtaining their terminal degree (e.g., Ph.D., M.D., D.V.M.). This training is for a limited term, expected to last no more than five years with any given UTHSC mentor. A fellow may not exceed eight years training in total. Fellows that began their training at UTHSC prior to January 1, 2015 will be given an additional 2 years to complete their training. It is conducted in an apprenticeship mode where the trainee works under the supervision of an investigator who is qualified to fulfill the responsibilities of a mentor.

I. Commitments by UTHSC

1. UTHSC oversight will be provided for terms of appointment, salary, benefits, grievance procedures and all other matters relevant to the support of postdoctoral Fellows.

2. A responsible UTHSC official will be designated to provide this oversight and a suitable office will be available for the administrative support of postdoctoral affairs.

3. UTHSC will work with the faculty to provide a no-cost/partial-cost health insurance plan for all full-time postdoctoral fellows.

4. Professional development seminars, skill-building workshops, opportunities to present original research (e.g., Postdoc Research Day), research ethics classes/seminars, and laboratory safety training will be provided by UTHSC for postdoctoral fellows.
5. UTHSC will strive to create a safe and pleasant work environment. For example, normally restricted parking lots will be accessible after hours and on weekends and holidays. In addition, UTHSC will ensure adequate desk and bench space in the laboratory is available for each postdoctoral fellow.

6. UTHSC will foster an environment in which postdoctoral fellows are treated with respect, inspired to be good citizens, urged to work in collegial collaboration with co-workers and support staff, and encouraged to participate in community service and help fulfill other missions of UTHSC.

7. UTHSC will work to develop the infrastructure necessary to maintain a database of postdoctoral fellow information. The information collected will be consistent with the required documentation for National Institutes of Health training grant proposals.

8. UTHSC will provide an opportunity for postdoctoral fellows and their mentors to fill out an annual Individual Development Plan and Annual Progress Report. The information collected will be used to help track postdoctoral fellow performance.

9. UTHSC will provide a mandatory postdoctoral fellow Exit Survey. Information from the survey will be used in a confidential manner to help enhance the postdoctoral fellow program for future postdoctoral fellows and mentors.

10. UTHSC will provide Postdoctoral Certificates to all postdoctoral fellows that are leaving the University upon completion of the mandatory exit survey.

11. UTHSC will provide an incentive of $200 to postdoctoral fellows who submit as a Principal Investigator grants for independent funding from a non-UTHSC source. The incentive will not be given for resubmissions of grants for which the incentive was already received. To be eligible for the incentive, postdoctoral fellows must list the College of Graduate Health Sciences as an Affiliated Department when routing the grant in PAMS. PAMS can be found at the following website: https://uthsc.tera.tennessee.edu/ramses/.

II. Commitments by Postdoctoral Fellows

1. I acknowledge that I have the primary responsibility for the development of my own career. I recognize that I must take a realistic look at career opportunities and follow a path that matches my individual skills, values and interests.

2. I will develop under the mentor’s guidance a research project that includes well-defined goals and timelines. Ideally, this project should be outlined and agreed upon at the time of the initial appointment.

3. I will perform my research activities conscientiously, maintain good research records, and catalog and maintain all tangible research materials that result from the research project. I recognize that as a postdoctoral fellow I am exempt from certain wage (i.e. overtime) and hour laws, similar to faculty, and that the hours/week put into a project can vary dramatically, requiring commitment of some evening, weekend, and holiday hours.
4. I will respect all ethical standards when conducting my research, including compliance with all UTHSC and federal regulations as they relate to responsible conduct in research, privacy and human subjects research, animal care and use, laboratory safety, and use of radioisotopes. I recognize that this commitment includes asking for guidelines when presented with ethical or compliance uncertainties and reporting on breeches of ethical or compliance standards by me and/or others.

5. I will show respect for and will work in collegial collaboration with my coworkers, support staff and other individuals with whom I interact. I will endeavor to be a good citizen in the laboratory, department, university, and community.

6. I will strive to assume progressive responsibility and management of my research project(s) as it matures. I recognize that assuming responsibility for the conduct of research projects is a critical step on the path to independence.

7. I will seek regular feedback on my performance and will request a formal evaluation from my supervisor at least annually.

8. I will have open and timely discussions with my mentor concerning the dissemination of research findings and the distribution to third parties of research materials.

9. I recognize that I have embarked on a career requiring “life-long learning.” To meet this obligation I must stay abreast of the latest developments in my specialized field through reading the literature, regular attendance at relevant seminar series, and attendance at scientific meetings.

10. I have the option, with my mentor’s approval, to seek opportunities outside the laboratory (e.g., professional development seminars and workshops in oral communication, scientific writing, and teaching) to develop the full set of professional skills necessary to be successful for my chosen career.

11. At the end of my appointment, in accordance with UTHSC policy, I will leave behind all original notebooks, computerized files, and tangible research materials so that other individuals can carry on related research. I can make copies of my notebooks and computerized files, and have access to tangible research materials that I helped to generate during my postdoctoral appointment, according to UTHSC policy.

12. If English is my second language, I will actively work to become proficient in spoken and written English. I will be open to my mentor’s suggestions for remediation.

III. Commitments Made and Work Conditions Created by Mentors

1. I acknowledge that the postdoctoral period is a time of advanced training intended to develop the independence and skills needed to promote the career of the postdoctoral fellow.

2. I will foster an environment in which trainees are treated with respect, inspired to be good citizens, urged to work in collegial collaboration with co-workers and
support staff, and encouraged to participate in community service and help fulfill other missions of UTHSC.

3. I will ensure that a mutually agreed upon set of workplace expectations are in place at the outset of the postdoctoral training period as outlined in my Individual Career Development plan. This initial discussion will include:

A. hours to be kept for a typical work day and expectations of number of work hours/week
   1. Hours worked will be consistent with their peers, in the respective departments at UTHSC and peers in similar areas of research at other institutions within the USA.
   2. The postdoctoral fellow will be recognized as a professional committed to obtaining the maximum research productivity. As such, the hours needed to complete tasks will vary.

B. the policy for annual leave (vacation) and holidays
   1. Vacation days granted for postdoctoral fellows are typically 2 weeks/year in addition to the week-long UTHSC-wide closing during the Winter Holiday and additional Administrative holidays/closing (see www.uthsc.edu/holidays.php for a complete listing of UTHSC Official Holiday Closings). The accrual of paid annual leave begins with the date of hire and is prorated.
   2. Specific requests for religious holidays should be discussed and honored when they do not present undue hardship to laboratory and career goals.
   3. The mentor and postdoctoral fellow should discuss possible situations which will necessitate working holiday hours in order to complete critical experiments, obtain data for grant submissions or bring manuscripts to the submission stage. If the postdoctoral fellow works during a UTHSC holiday, the postdoctoral fellow may take those vacation days at a later time.
   4. Any additional vacation time in excess of that listed in point B.1 above must be approved by the mentor in writing using the Request for Extended Unpaid Leave form (http://www.uthsc.edu/postdoc/pdfs/extended-leave-policy-form-pdo.pdf).

C. the policy for sick leave, leave for a family crisis, and maternity leave
   1. This policy will be equally applied to all postdoctoral fellows in the laboratory.
   2. A hallmark of such policy will be respect for the individual.
3. Postdoctoral fellows will be provided with reasonable amounts of sick leave that are consistent with standard practices on campus, which is one day a month. The mentor, on a case-by-case basis, will approve requests for sick leave. Sick leave may be requested for the postdoctoral fellow him/herself or to care for family members.

4. Postdoctoral fellows will be provided with funeral/bereavement leave that are consistent with standard practices on campus, which are 3-5 days (see policy.tennessee.edu/hr.policy/hr03401 for complete details).

5. Postdoctoral fellows are eligible for the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) following federal guidelines as outlined by the United States Department of Labor

   a. To be eligible, a postdoctoral fellow must have worked at UTHSC the previous 12 months

   b. If eligible, a postdoctoral fellow will be guaranteed up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave

   c. All FMLA paperwork must be processed through the department of Human Resources

   d. Details of FMLA and other medical/personal leave programs can be found at http://policy.tennessee.edu/hr_policy/

D. an orientation as to the role/job of personnel currently in the lab

   1. Of particular importance will be to delineate how the postdoctoral fellow is expected to interact with various lab members, and a discussion on the extent of time the postdoctoral fellow will train and mentor more junior lab members.

   E. the principles of research ethics and integrity, and the lab policy with regard to maintenance of lab records and data books.

4. I will work with the postdoctoral fellow to create an Individual Development Plan (IDP) within the first few months of his/her arrival to my lab.

   A. The IDP will be as specific as is possible in regard to both studies to be completed in the first year, and a plan to reach identified milestones of career development.

   B. The IDP will be agreed upon, signed by mentor and trainee, and a copy forwarded to the Office.

   C. It is understood that these plans may change at the discretion of the mentor depending on laboratory goals and or funding.

5. I acknowledge that open communication and periodic performance reviews, conducted annually, will help ensure that the expectations of both parties are met.
6. I will work with the postdoctoral fellow to generate an Annual Progress Report (APR).
   A. The APR will be as specific as is possible in regard to both studies to be completed in the upcoming year, and a plan to reach identified milestones of career development.
   B. The APR will be agreed upon, filled out online and maintained in the postdoctoral fellow’s file
   C. It is understood that these plans may change at the discretion of the mentor depending on laboratory goals and or funding.

7. To further the goal of reasonable yearly progress, identified times will be set aside to review weekly progress and discuss experimental and / or general laboratory concerns.

8. I will ensure that the postdoctoral fellow has sufficient opportunities to acquire the skills necessary to become an expert in an agreed-upon area of investigation.

9. I will encourage the interaction of the postdoctoral fellows with fellow scientists both intra- and extramurally and encourage the trainee’s attendance at professional meetings to network and present research findings. Every effort will be made to financially support their annual attendance at a National Scientific meeting.

10. I will provide a training environment that is suited to the individual needs of the postdoctoral fellow in order to ensure his/her personal and professional growth. I will encourage a progressive increase in the level of responsibility and independence to facilitate the transition to a fully independent career.
    A. To further this goal, postdoctoral fellows will not be treated as technicians. They will be treated as professionals training to be able to independently formulate meaningful hypotheses, design research projects, and conduct interpretable experiments.
    B. To further this goal, postdoctoral fellows will share in the duties needed to maintain the lab, but will not be primarily responsible for lab management and training. There is an expectation that postdoctoral fellows will supervise students in the lab and, as such, learn how to be an effective mentor. However, these opportunities will depend on the project, the availability of students and the abilities of the postdoctoral fellow.
    C. The development of skills, including oral and written communication, grant writing and laboratory management, are understood to be integral to the training of postdoctoral fellows.
    D. Consistent with a commitment to fostering career growth, a policy of zero tolerance for racism, sexism, creedism, favoritism, or nepotism will be maintained (See http://uthsc.edu/oed/ for details on UT policies on equity and diversity).
E. For postdoctoral fellows who are not US citizens, pressure with respect to visa status / loss of status will not be used to intimidate and extract extraordinary efforts.

F. Two postdoctoral fellows will not be assigned identical projects, but may be assigned to portions of a project that lead to a single shared publication.

11. I will promote all ethical standards for conducting research including compliance with all UTHSC and federal regulations as they relate to responsible conduct in research, privacy and human subjects research, animal care and use, laboratory safety, and use of radioisotopes. I will clearly define expectations for conduct of research in my lab and make myself available to discuss ethical concerns as they arise.

12. I will provide the required guidance and mentoring, and will seek the assistance of other faculty and department/institutional resources when necessary. Although I am expected to provide guidance and education in technical areas, I recognize that I must also educate the postdoctoral fellow by example and by providing access to formal opportunities/programs in complementary areas necessary for a successful career.

13. I will ensure that the research performed by a postdoctoral fellow is submitted for publication in a timely manner and that he/she receives appropriate credit for the work he/she performs. I will acknowledge his/her contribution to the development of any intellectual property and will clearly define future access to tangible research materials according to UTHSC policy.

   A. To further this goal, the laboratory policy of authorship on manuscripts will be clearly defined at the outset of training or at the start of a new study. This policy will be based on journal guidelines. Typically, authorship requires the contribution of at least one figure or piece of data critical to the publication of the manuscript.

   B. Should it be necessary for a project to be reassigned, the mentor and postdoctoral fellow will discuss the reasons for reassignment.

14. I recognize that there are multiple career options available for a postdoctoral fellow and will provide assistance in exploring appropriate options. I recognize that not all postdoctoral fellows will become academic faculty. To prepare a postdoctoral fellow for other career paths, I will direct him/her to the resources that explore non-academic careers, and discuss these options. Further, wherever possible, I will provide opportunities to gain experience in skills such as teaching and lab management.

15. I will commit to being a supportive colleague to my postdoctoral fellows as they transition the next stage of their career and to the extent possible, throughout their professional life. I recognize that the role of a mentor continues after the formal training period.
IV. Grievance Procedures in the Case of Noncompliance

1. Informal Resolution of Grievances: A postdoctoral fellow with a grievance should first discuss the grievance with one of the following people: his/her faculty mentor, the department Chair, Associate Dean, Postdoc Office, Dean of the Graduate School or the UTHSC Human Resources Office. If the grievance cannot be resolved informally, then the postdoctoral fellow can file a formal grievance.

2. Formal Grievance Procedure for an Academic Issue (including, but not limited to, authorship concerns or research ethics):
   A. A written complaint should be filed with the Associate Dean of the Postdoc Office, include the allegation of the grievance with pertinent facts, names of persons involved and possible witnesses, and a summary of steps taken thus far in an attempt to resolve the problem.
   B. The Associate Dean of the Postdoc Office, will then appoint an ad hoc grievance committee.
   C. The ad hoc grievance committee will review the complaint and do what is necessary to investigate the grievance.
   D. The ad hoc grievance committee will presents a written report of its findings and a recommendation of action to the Associate Dean of the Postdoc Office. All reasonable precautions will be taken to ensure the confidentiality of information obtained at meetings of the ad hoc grievance committee.
   E. If the ad hoc grievance committee report indicates the grievance or elements of the grievance are justified, the Associate Dean of the Postdoc Office, may then take the following actions:
      1. meet with the departmental Chair and the faculty mentor to discuss how the issue will be resolved.
      2. in the case of repeated grievances, identify the faculty mentor as unsuitable for mentoring of postdoctoral fellows and encourage the departmental Chair to include this failing in the annual faculty review of that mentor.
      3. in the case of an extreme grievance, request for dismissal of the faculty from UTHSC.
   F. Formal Grievance Procedure for a Workplace Issue (including, but not limited to, sexual or racial harassment):
      1. Procedures to be followed for UTHSC can be found on Human Resources Office Homepage:
         http://www.uthsc.edu/hr/employee-relations/grievance.php