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The UTHSC Compact

Commitments and Work Conditions for Postdoctoral Scholars at UTHSC

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

Postdoctoral Scholars 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 scholar may not exceed eight years training in total. 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 scholars.
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. Postdoctoral scholars are University of Tennessee Health Science Center (UTHSC) employees and as employees will receive all employee benefits and must adhere to UTHSC policies and procedures, Benefits and Policy and Procedures are located at: <https://policy.tennessee.edu/policytech-policies/pt-sw-hr/>
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 scholars.

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 scholar.
6. UTHSC will foster an environment in which postdoctoral scholars 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 scholars 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 scholars 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 scholar performance.
9. UTHSC will provide a postdoctoral scholar Exit Survey. Information from the survey will be used in a confidential manner to help enhance the postdoctoral scholar program for future postdoctoral scholars and mentors.
10. UTHSC will provide Postdoctoral Certificates to all postdoctoral scholars that are leaving the University upon completion of the exit survey, all relevant IDP/APR and all mandatory online training.
11. UTHSC will provide an incentive of \$200 to postdoctoral scholars 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 scholars must list the College of Graduate Health Sciences as an Affiliated Department when routing the grant in Cayuse. Cayuse can be found at the following website: <https://tennessee.cayuse424.com>.

II. Commitments by Postdoctoral Scholars

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 scholar, 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 scholar.

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. 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 scholar 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 scholars are typically 2 days per month. 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 scholar 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 scholar works during a UTHSC holiday, the postdoctoral scholar may take those days at a later time as paid leave.
 - C. the policy for sick leave, leave for a family crisis, and maternity leave
 1. This policy will be equally applied to all postdoctoral scholars in the laboratory.
 2. A hallmark of such policy will be respect for the individual.
 3. Postdoctoral scholar will be provided 8 hours of sick leave per month. The mentor, on a case-by-case basis, will approve requests for sick leave. Sick leave may be requested for the postdoctoral scholar him/herself or to care for family members.

4. Postdoctoral scholars will be provided with funeral/bereavement leave that are consistent with standard practices on campus. (see policy.tennessee.edu/hr.policy/hr03401 for complete details).
 - a. Postdoctoral scholars are eligible for the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) following federal guidelines as outlined by the United States Department of Labor. 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 scholar is expected to interact with various lab members, and a discussion on the extent of time the postdoctoral scholar 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 scholar 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 scholar.
 - 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 scholar 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 scholar's 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 scholar 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 scholar 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 scholar 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 scholars 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 scholars 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 scholar 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 scholar.
 - 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 scholars.
 - 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 scholars 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 scholars 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 scholar 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 scholar 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 scholar will discuss the reasons for reassignment.
14. I recognize that there are multiple career options available for a postdoctoral scholar and will provide assistance in exploring appropriate options. I recognize that not all postdoctoral scholars will become academic faculty. To prepare a postdoctoral scholar 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 scholar 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

Informal Resolution of Grievances: A postdoctoral scholar 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 Associate Vice Chancellor of Human Resources. If the grievance cannot be resolved informally, then the postdoctoral scholar can file a formal grievance with Office of Equity and Diversity at <https://www.uthsc.edu/oed/file-complaint.php>.