
Effective Date: **March 1, 2016**

Revised: **April 16, 2024**

POLICY

ACADEMICS, RESEARCH AND SCHOLARLY ACTIVITIES

Postdoctoral Scholars Policy

RESPONSIBLE OFFICE

Office of the University Provost

1. Purpose:

Boston University is committed to providing a supportive and productive training environment for our community of postdoctoral scholars. This Policy defines the postdoctoral scholar role and guides the appointment process, creating consistency across our Schools, Colleges, Research Centers and Institutes.

2. Covered Parties:

All postdoctoral scholars at Boston University and any member of the Boston University community who sponsors or administers postdoctoral appointments are responsible for acting in accordance with the provisions of this Policy.

3. Defined Terms:

“Postdoctoral scholar”. Postdoctoral scholars at Boston University are individuals who have fulfilled the requirements for a doctoral degree (or equivalent) and are engaged in a temporary and defined period of mentored advanced training. Postdoctoral scholars must be involved in research at Boston University. They also may be involved in teaching or service in accordance with their professional goals. A postdoctoral position is an academic role designed to enhance the professional skills and research independence needed for the individual to pursue their chosen career path.

“Mentor”. The University faculty member or principal investigator responsible for the appointment, supervision and mentoring of a postdoctoral scholar.

“Years of service”. Number of years of a postdoctoral scholar’s appointment, calculated by the start date of their first postdoctoral position at Boston University.

“Compensation”. Financial compensation or living expenses associated with research or scholarship performed at Boston University, either paid via University funding sources (e.g. grants awarded to the University, departmental funds) as a salary or paid via external funding sources (e.g. training grants, foreign/private fellowships) as a stipend.

“Benefits”. Programs provided to eligible Boston University employees in addition to their wages or salary.

4. University Policy:

4.1 Categories of a postdoctoral scholar

Boston University has different appointment categories for postdoctoral scholars that are differentiated by the funding source of the postdoctoral scholar's compensation. Postdoctoral scholars are classified as employees as long as a portion of the postdoctoral scholar's compensation (either salary or stipend) is paid by Boston University; in rare cases where the postdoctoral scholar is paid by sources completely external to the University, they will be considered non-employees.

4.2 Postdoctoral appointments

Units are responsible for providing an offer letter for each new appointment or appointment renewal that describes the postdoctoral scholar's monthly compensation, funding source, primary appointment location, and the University benefits and policies applicable to them. Offer letters may include information specific to the School/College or Research Center/Institute appointing the postdoctoral scholar but at a minimum must include the information provided in the template developed by Professional Development and Postdoctoral Affairs. All offer letters should be signed by the Mentor, the department chair or center director, and the dean or their designee. Mentors should ensure that postdoctoral scholars countersign each appointment or appointment renewal letter.

Postdoctoral appointments should initially be for no more than two years, and are renewable up to five years. No postdoctoral scholar's appointment may be renewed beyond five years without the prior written approval of the Vice President and Associate Provost for Research. All postdoctoral scholar appointments must include research effort. All postdoctoral appointments must be full-time and 100% effort unless prior approval is received by the Vice President and Associate Provost for Research.

Mentors must provide an annual review to each postdoctoral scholar, either as part of the University's process for staff or in cadence with the annual cycle of the funding source that pays for their appointment. Templates for annual reviews are available from Professional Development and Postdoctoral Affairs.

Postdoctoral scholars should receive at least four weeks written notice of the renewal or non-renewal of their appointment. Postdoctoral scholar appointments automatically terminate at the end of each appointment described in their offer letter unless renewed. Postdoctoral scholar appointments may be terminated for misconduct or poor performance during the appointment year.

4.3 Compensation

All postdoctoral scholars will be paid at least the minimum salary or stipend set forth by Boston University, including those paid by external sources. On an annual basis, the Vice President and Associate Provost for Research will communicate the salary/stipend minimums by years of service to all units sponsoring postdoctoral appointments. Postdoctoral scholars are eligible for annual increases that are included in years of service minimums and those will be implemented automatically at the start of each year of service within their appointment letter.

4.4 Benefits

As employees of Boston University, postdoctoral scholars are eligible for all staff benefits offered by Human Resources. In the rare case that a postdoctoral scholar is a non-employee, they are eligible only to enroll in the staff healthcare benefits and transportation discount programs.

4.5 Years of service

An individual can only hold postdoctoral positions at Boston University for a period of five years regardless of the number of unique postdoctoral appointments held within the University. Only compelling circumstances (e.g. extended leaves of absence) can extend the five-year term limit and written approval from the Vice President and Associate Provost for Research is required. After five years, postdoctoral scholars in good performance standing are eligible to apply for any open position at Boston University or may transition into an appropriate research staff position or academic faculty role. Previous postdoctoral experience at other institutions is not considered to be part of a postdoctoral scholar's years of service at Boston University.

4.6 Career plans

All postdoctoral scholars must submit an annual career plan via the Professional Development and Postdoctoral Affairs website. New postdoctoral scholars must submit the career plan within two months of the start of their appointment and subsequently submit updated plans annually. Templates for career plans are available from Professional Development and Postdoctoral Affairs; postdoctoral scholars may choose the template most relevant to their career goals and mentoring context. Mentors must sign the career plan prior to submission.

5. Responsible Parties:

The **Vice President and Associate Provost for Research** is responsible for annually communicating the salary minimum to all units sponsoring postdoctoral scholarship and for considering any exceptions to the effort, compensation, or years of service policy guidelines. Any such exceptions require written approval.

Human Resources, the **International Students and Scholars Office**, and **Professional Development & Postdoctoral Affairs** are jointly responsible for ensuring the implementation of the policy and procedures by all departments, centers, and institutes that appoint non-faculty research staff.

Mentors are responsible for ensuring that all postdoctoral appointments meet policy guidelines and that appropriate procedures are followed. Typically, this oversight will occur in the context of usual department, center, or institute processes for appointing non-faculty research staff. Mentors also are responsible for mentoring and annually evaluating postdoctoral scholars.

6. Related Policies and References:

Individual Schools/Colleges and Research Centers/Institutes may have guidelines related to

the appointment of postdoctoral scholars that may extend beyond what is defined in this policy.

END OF POLICY TEXT

Additional Resources Regarding This Policy

History

This policy was drafted by the Research and Scholarly Activities Committee in 2015 and approved in 2016. It was revised in 2023, and changes were approved on April 16, 2024.

Categories: Academics, Registration and Attendance, Research and Scholarly Activities, Student Academics