

**POSTDOCTORAL  
SCHOLARS  
EMPLOYMENT  
HANDBOOK**



## Contact Information

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# INTRODUCTION

Case Western Reserve University strives to be the most powerful learning environment in the world. As a postdoctoral scholar you are an important member of the university team that includes faculty, staff and researchers who are dedicated to achieving excellence in teaching, scholarship and research. The University depends on the collective efforts of a diverse workforce made up of individuals committed to excellence in service and performance. In keeping with this commitment, the University establishes guidelines for policy formulation and administration which:

- Emphasize the integrity of the University community through a unified institutional effort;
- Support and promote individual development for the betterment of the community;
- Recognize individual contribution at all levels and appreciate innovative effort and accomplishments, and;
- Encourage open communication and shared stake holding to accomplish the mission.

## **Administration of Postdoctoral Scholars Program**

Employment as a postdoctoral scholar is governed by the Policies and Procedures contained in this Postdoctoral Scholar Employment Handbook, Postdoctoral Trainee Handbook and the Policies and Procedures of the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs and the School of Graduate Studies. The University's Human Resources Policies and Procedures Manual do not apply to Postdoctoral Scholars.

## **The Office of Postdoctoral Affairs**

The Office of Postdoctoral Affairs, located in the School of Graduate Studies, has been established to ensure that the highest possible standards underlie a postdoctoral scholar's training experience at Case Western Reserve University. Specifically, this office is responsible for assisting in the development and implementation of all University policies applicable to postdoctoral scholars and for monitoring the application of these policies. The following are some of the services that are offered by the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs:

- Employment-related activities including letters of appointment, extension, and termination of appointments,

- Postdoctoral employment opportunities
- Annual performance evaluations
- Training and education program development
- Surveying quality of training experience
- Coordination of all grievance procedures

### **Definition of Postdoctoral Scholar\***

A postdoctoral scholar is defined as a special class of employee who:

- holds a Ph.D. or equivalent
- works on scholarly projects funded by grants obtained by others at the University or is funded by department funds
- is engaged in a mentored training relationship with a member of the University faculty, and
- actively pursues fellowship/grant funding for his/her own research project in order to develop his/her future professional career.\*\*

The postdoctoral scholar is eligible to participate in a special healthcare benefit plan, but is excluded from participating in all other CWRU benefits including employee retirement and benefit plans.

\*Postdoctoral scholars are not to be confused with postdoctoral fellows who are not employees of the University and receive their funding from grants they have applied for and obtained from outside sources and not faculty-sponsored research grants.

\*\*Once such funding has been obtained, the postdoctoral scholar becomes a postdoctoral fellow and is governed by the Postdoctoral Trainee Handbook.

### **Criteria for Postdoctoral Scholars**

1. The postdoctoral scholar was recently (normally within 5 years) awarded a Ph.D. or equivalent degree in an appropriate field.
2. The appointment is temporary and postdoctoral scholars are expected to complete their mentored training within 5 years.
3. The time devoted to this appointment as well as the specific scholarly training activities will be decided in collaboration with the mentor and committed in writing in the form of a training plan. All postdoctoral scholars will be encouraged to pursue additional training and other opportunities in the respective areas up to 25% of their time.

4. The appointee will train under the supervision of a senior scholar (mentor).

This handbook should not be construed in any way to constitute an agreement between the University and its postdoctoral scholars with respect to level of compensation, duration of employment or any other matter. Under no circumstances should this handbook or the Postdoctoral Trainee Handbook be considered a contract of employment or a legally binding agreement.

# Section I Employment

Postdoctoral scholars and candidates for postdoctoral scholar employment should have a good understanding of the employment opportunities available and the employment requirements expected at CWRU. Numerous federal, state, and local laws govern many of the systems established in the employment process. Additionally, reasonable steps have been made to ensure that the postdoctoral scholar workforce is diverse and comprised of qualified and talented postdoctoral scholars who are willing to work in a mutually supportive manner.

## **Affirmative Action**

The University establishes Affirmative Action goals in an effort to build a qualified University community reflecting the composition of the Cleveland community and region. (See also Equal Employment Opportunity)

## **Application**

Postdoctoral scholars are expected to hold a doctoral degree from an Accredited Institution and to furnish proof of such degree(s). If the postdoctoral candidate has completed the requirements for the doctoral degree but has not yet received her/his degree, then she/he is required to supply documents certifying the date when the degree will be conferred.

All postdoctoral scholars will complete a job application and certify that all of the information listed on the job application and curriculum vitae are true. Any misrepresentation or omission of facts on the curriculum vitae or job application will be sufficient cause for refusal of appointment or dismissal from employment with the University.

Postdoctoral scholar candidates must submit the following to the University prior to employment:

1. Curriculum Vitae
2. Degree or documentation thereof
3. Letter accepting terms of appointment

Every attempt will be made to interview the postdoctoral scholar before their arrival at CWRU.

### **Criminal Background Check**

A criminal background check will be conducted on the preferred internal postdoctoral scholar or external postdoctoral scholar candidate by an independent professional investigation firm before an offer of employment/training is extended. Additional criminal background checks may be performed throughout employment/ training.

If a postdoctoral scholar is convicted of a crime while employed, the postdoctoral scholar is required to discuss this with their mentor and the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs. Continued employment/training is dependent on the nature of the conviction.

### **Disability and Disabled Veteran**

The University's Affirmative Action program includes the employment and advancement in employment of qualified disabled persons and veterans and veterans of the Vietnam Era. Postdoctoral scholars who would like to participate in this program may disclose the nature of the disability to the Office of Equal Opportunity and Diversity.

Participation in this program is strictly voluntary. If a disability affects the postdoctoral scholar's performance or might create a hazard to the postdoctoral scholar or others, then additional information will be helpful such as: 1) the skills and procedures the postdoctoral scholar uses or intends to use to perform in their mentored training employment experience, and 2) the accommodations that the University may make which would help the postdoctoral scholar perform the job properly and safely.

### **Equal Employment Opportunity**

Case Western Reserve University does not discriminate in recruitment, employment, nor policy administration on the basis of race, religion, age, sex, color, disability, sexual orientation, national or ethnic origin, political affiliation, or status as a disabled veteran or veteran of the Vietnam era.

If a postdoctoral scholar believes that the Affirmative Action and Equal Employment Opportunity policy is not being fully implemented, then the postdoctoral scholar has the right to discuss any concerns with the Office of Equal Opportunity and Diversity or to request a review process through the EEO Complaint Procedure.

## **Holidays**

The University observes the following holidays by closing for business:

New Year's Day	Thanksgiving Day
Martin Luther King Day	Day after Thanksgiving
Memorial Day	Christmas Day
Independence Day	University Designated Holiday(s)
Labor Day	

Certain guidelines define when a postdoctoral scholar has time off for a holiday and whether that time off is compensated. The guidelines for time off are:

- Active postdoctoral scholars have the time off for the observed holiday, unless otherwise scheduled. When the holiday falls on a Saturday, the University will observe the holiday on the preceding Friday. When the holiday falls on a Sunday, the University will observe the holiday on the following Monday. Postdoctoral scholars who work Monday through Friday will have the Friday or Monday off. Postdoctoral scholars whose regular work day may be either Saturday or Sunday will have either the observed holiday or the actual holiday off. Scheduling of the day off will depend on necessary coverage and team coordination of that coverage.
- When an observed holiday falls on the postdoctoral scholar's normal day off, all full-time postdoctoral scholars may schedule a paid day off within two weeks preceding or following the holiday.
- Postdoctoral scholars, who are required to work on the observed holiday, will have the same amount of time off in the preceding or following two weeks.

Compensation for Holidays:

- Postdoctoral scholars will be compensated at their normal rate of pay for their regular hours if the observed holiday falls on the postdoctoral scholar's scheduled work day or during paid income protection or discretionary days.
- Holiday pay will apply to postdoctoral scholars on paid leave.

## **Inclusion**

The University prides itself on being understanding, welcoming and supportive to all members of the University community.

Therefore, valuing diversity is a key part of CWRU employment standards. The key principles infostering inclusion are:

- The ability to achieve common goals while valuing differences
- The opportunity for postdoctoral scholars to develop their skills to their full potential
- A better understanding of CWRU as a community of cultures
- Participation in Diversity initiatives
- Celebration and social activities that build awareness and appreciation.

### **Pay Days and Payroll Withholdings**

Postdoctoral scholars will be paid monthly on the last working day of the month. The University will automatically deduct from the gross pay any withholdings required for federal, state, and local taxes as well as mandated deductions and any payroll deductions elected by the postdoctoral scholar.

### **Postdoctoral Scholar Records**

Postdoctoral scholars are responsible for notifying the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs on a timely basis of any changes in personal status that change benefits enrollment or contact information. Relevant changes in status include: name change, change in marital status, change in tax withholding, change in address (home or campus), change in emergency contact, change in dependents and change in employment status.

Postdoctoral scholars have the right to access their files. They also have the right to submit a document to the file if they wish to correct inaccurate information or express disagreement with information on file. The postdoctoral scholar should also provide his or her mentor with a copy of any submitted items.

### **Productivity**

All postdoctoral scholars are expected to meet high productivity standards. At CWRU productivity relates to time management, teamwork, efficiency, cooperation, and contribution. The standards contributing to high productivity include, but are not limited to, the following:

- consistently reporting to work and leaving work according to work/training schedule
- fully engaging in work/training while on paid time
- limiting unscheduled absences
- minimizing the need to conduct personal business during work hours
- scholar's responsibilities

### **Re-employment**

Postdoctoral scholars are eligible to be re-employed if they left University employment as postdoctoral scholars in good standing. They will be given the same opportunities and will need to comply with the same requirements as other applicants. If hired, former postdoctoral scholars will be treated as new postdoctoral scholars and/or employees for purposes of orientation and training. Benefits based on length of service will be calculated using the rehire start date as their first date of employment unless a benefit plan provides other methods of calculation.

### **Renewal and Extension of an Appointment**

Decisions and agreements between the Mentor and the Postdoctoral Scholar leading to the renewal or extension of an appointment beyond the term defined in the initial offer letter should be made 90 days in advance of the termination of the current appointment period, during the evaluation of the Postdoctoral Scholar.

The agreement to renew or extend an appointment should be documented by a letter of appointment and coordinated through the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs.

### **Termination of Employment**

The University recognizes two types of termination: voluntary and involuntary.

**Voluntary terminations** include: resignation, failure to report to work for three consecutive days without notice, failure to return from leave as scheduled, and completion of the appointment term.

**Involuntary terminations** include: termination for cause, and death.

A postdoctoral scholar who wants to leave in good standing prior to the completion of the appointment term will make every effort to negotiate reasonable terms for such voluntary termination with his or her mentor and shall provide at least two weeks advance notice of such voluntary termination.

Postdoctoral scholars who are terminating employment will be notified in writing of their benefit enrollment and conversion options.

All eligible postdoctoral scholars will have the option under COBRA to elect to continue their health care coverage to be paid at the postdoctoral scholar's expense, but handled administratively through the University's group healthcare plan.

**Termination by the Mentor**

In the absence of a letter of reappointment, Postdoctoral Scholars should assume that their appointment will terminate on the date stated in their appointment letter. Generally, appointments are made on a one year basis. Poor performance, however, can lead to early termination and will be coordinated by both the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs and Employee Relations in Human Resources in conjunction with the mentor.

**Termination by the Postdoctoral Scholar**

Early termination due to another employment opportunity needs to be negotiated with the mentor and prospective employer. Every effort should be made to honor the original term of employment.

## Section II Compensation & Benefits

### **Benefits**

The University's postdoctoral scholar benefit program includes: 1) reasonably priced health and welfare coverage; 2) income protection; and, 3) paid time off. *Postdoctoral scholars are not eligible to participate in University retirement planning or educational assistance or other benefits.*

### **Compensation**

The University will endeavor to set compensation levels in accordance with guidelines established for the NIH NRSA program.

### **Discretionary Days**

Postdoctoral scholars need to have paid time off for recreational, religious, cultural, and other personal reasons. A reasonable period of time per fiscal year is allowable regardless of the reason for using the time and the University prefers to provide this time as discretionary days.

Discretionary days may be used at the postdoctoral scholar's discretion and with the mentor's approval, provided that:

- The time off is pre-scheduled and coordinated with other time off
- The time off is used in whole or half-day increments

Postdoctoral scholars accrue discretionary days monthly and may use them as the days accrue at any point during the fiscal year. Unused earned discretionary days can also be carried over to the next fiscal year. The maximum amount of days that can be carried over cannot exceed the postdoctoral scholar's maximum annual allowance.

- 1 - 5 years of service:  $1\frac{1}{3}$  days per month (16 days per year)

### **Emergency Salary Advance**

There may be emergency circumstances, defined as unforeseen, unplanned, and unavoidable events, which demand immediate attention and require a postdoctoral scholar to secure funds on short notice. If this occurs, the University is willing to assist the postdoctoral scholar by providing a salary advance against days worked in the current pay period.

The amount of a salary advance will be limited to 70% of the gross pay earned in the period and a minimum of \$50.00. Only one advance per 12 month period will be authorized per postdoctoral scholar. Advance requests are to be submitted to the postdoctoral scholar's mentor and the Compensation Office of the Human Resources Department.

### **Employee Assistance Program**

Postdoctoral scholars occasionally experience personal situations that are difficult to handle without professional assistance. For that reason the University provides an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) which is available to every postdoctoral scholar. Services, available at no cost to the postdoctoral scholar, include: career counseling, chemical dependency, elder or child care, financial solvency, grief, marital and family counseling, and psychological counseling. Referral agencies are local contacts accomplished in their areas of expertise. The postdoctoral scholar is assured of confidentiality in using the Employee Assistance Program.

If a postdoctoral scholar needs to make special work arrangements for a short time to accommodate necessary counseling, the Employee Relations Office will work with the postdoctoral scholar and supervisor in confidence to meet short term needs.

### **Income Protection (see also Leaves of Absence)**

Income protection for Family Medical, Parenting, and Personal Medical reasons is allowed based on years of service. A postdoctoral scholar may accrue unused balances from year to year. Postdoctoral scholars may draw from their income protection balance up to a maximum of 12 weeks within any twelve month time period for personal medical leaves.

Postdoctoral scholars have the option to use up to eight days annually of their unused paid income protection for bereavement, parenting, or family medical leave. Documentation may be requested for absences exceeding five (5) consecutive days.

### **Jury Duty**

The University encourages postdoctoral scholars to honor their civil responsibilities. Therefore, the University will continue to pay a postdoctoral scholar at the regular rate of pay for the time spent on jury duty.

## **Leaves of Absence**

Each year postdoctoral scholars will receive up to 10 paid income protection days to be used for both personal and family medical purposes. A postdoctoral scholar may draw upon the allowance either intermittently or in total over the twelve-month period based on eligibility date. “Eligibility date” refers to the date of the postdoctoral scholar’s first FMLA leave within the previous twelve months.

Postdoctoral scholars use the same allowance for both intermittent leave requests (such as prescheduled time off for medical appointments or reduced work time), if it relates to the personal medical or family medical leave request, or more significant events requiring a leave such as a serious health condition of a family member or a serious health condition of the postdoctoral scholar (including Worker’s Compensation).

The annual maximum leave time for personal medical, parenting, or family medical reasons is 12 weeks within a 12 month period. The maximum allowed time may be affected by other leaves taken within the previous 12 months so postdoctoral scholars must use leave time appropriately. Postdoctoral scholars are responsible for providing the proper documentation required for all intermittent leave requests of any duration and for personal or family medical leave requests of more than 5 consecutive working days for the same serious health condition.

Postdoctoral scholars on paid leave will remain in their special care health insurance program for 12 weeks and will continue to accrue service time toward benefits based on active service. Postdoctoral scholars have the option of using earned discretionary days after they have exhausted their paid income protection allowance.

A postdoctoral scholar may request an unpaid *personal leave* for reasons other than medical which conflict with their availability for the training/employment experience. Permission to take an unpaid personal leave must be requested in writing and in advance from the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs and the mentor. This request must be signed by the mentor and the Director of the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs, and should include the dates of the requested leave of absence. Approval of a postdoctoral scholar’s request for unpaid personal leave shall be solely at the discretion of the mentor and the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs.

In the event that a personal leave is approved, the postdoctoral scholar and mentor will agree as to the start/end dates of the personal leave and the postdoctoral scholar is responsible for arranging for health insurance continuation through monthly payments for both the University's contribution and the postdoctoral scholar's contribution. Paid unused earned discretionary time will be used prior to commencing the unpaid portion of the leave but will be included as part of the total leave time.

### **Military Duty**

Any annual commitment to active duty or a call to active duty constitutes a military leave. During the military leave, the postdoctoral scholar will be compensated for the first two weeks of active duty. If the active duty is less than three months, the postdoctoral scholar will be responsible for the postdoctoral scholar's contribution to the Benelect plan. If the active duty extends beyond three months, the postdoctoral scholar will be responsible for the postdoctoral scholar's and the University's contribution.

## Glossary

“**Active status**” refers to the timeframe when employees receive compensation related to their working at the University.

“**COBRA**” refers to the Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1986 which requires that most employers offer employees and their families the opportunity for a temporary extension of health coverage in certain instances where their coverage would otherwise end.

“**Dependent children**” refers to the prevailing IRS definition in effect.

“**Dependents**” refers to spouse and/or dependent children for which the employee provides significant financial support.

“**Disabilities**” is used according to its definition in Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 which is: an individual who either 1) has a physical or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more of that person’s major life activities, 2) has a record of such an impairment, or 3) is regarded as having such an impairment.

“**Earned time**” refers to the amount of paid time that can be taken in the current fiscal year.

“**Eligibility date**” refers to the date of the employee’s first FMLA leave within the previous twelve months.

“**Employee Assistance Provider (EAP)**” is a contracted service that provides voluntary, private, and confidential counseling services and resources for employees and family members to help identify problems and develop plans for resolutions.

“**Family medical**” includes time to care for an ill family member for medical reasons.

“**Fiscal year**” refers to the period of July 1 through June 30.

“**Mentor**” refers to a faculty member who provides research supervision and promotes the intellectual and professional development of postdoctoral scholar or postdoctoral fellow.

“**Parenting**” refers to care and nurturing for a new child as a result of childbirth, adoption or foster custody, unrelated to a medical condition.

“**Personal medical**” includes income protection time and all medical disabilities as certified by a health care provider including the time prior, during and post childbirth

“**Postdoctoral scholars**” are a special class of employees of the University eligible to participate in a special healthcare benefit plan, but are not eligible to receive other University benefits including the retirement plan and Benelect.

“**Serious illness**” and “**serious health condition**” normally are defined as an illness which requires daily or continuing treatment as certified by a health care provider.