

Guidelines for Postdoctoral Fellows

The University of Chicago Biological Sciences Division - March 2007

The BSD Postdoctoral Association produced these guidelines at the request of postdocs who wanted clear information about university policies relating to their fellowships. Please send comments, suggestions and questions about this document to James McCracken jamesmcc@uchicago.edu.

These guidelines are based on three University of Chicago documents available on the BSD Postdoctoral Association's webpage <http://www.bsdpostdoc.uchicago.edu>

- 1) Biological Sciences Division Postdoctoral Training Guidelines
- 2) Postdoctoral Fellows' Supplementary Stipend
- 3) Coverage Options for Postdoctoral Fellows

The University of Chicago is currently revising postdoc policy and plans to publish a new handbook for postdocs.

Postdoctoral Fellows (PFs)

PFs are funded from a grant or fellowship paid as a stipend. PFs are **not employees** of The University of Chicago. Find out if your fellowship can be paid as a salary. If it can, you can be a Postdoctoral Scholar. This entitles you to all the benefits of a University of Chicago employee. However, very few fellowships can be paid as salary, for example, NIH NRSA fellowships must be paid as stipends.

Compensation

Regardless of their funding source, all PFs are paid an amount that is no less than the minimum amount established by the NIH/NRSA schedule in effect at the time of appointment. Thus, the minimum allowable compensation for postdoctoral trainees with appointments commencing during the period from July 1, 2006 through June 30, 2007 will be \$36,996. Any increase above this minimum is at the discretion of the faculty who accept the PF into his/her research laboratory. If the PF is supported by a NIH NRSA fellowship their compensation may not be increased using federal funds. However, other types of PF may receive higher compensation in this way.

Supplemental Stipend

Beginning January 1, 2004 postdoctoral fellows in the Biological Sciences Division will be provided an annual supplement to their stipend to assist in the purchase of health, dental, life and long-term disability coverage, and allows a contribution toward an individual retirement account (see **Retirement** below). This action is taken in response to the current disparity in living support available to postdoctoral fellows who are funded by training stipends and postdoctoral employees who receive salary and benefits from the University. Since postdoctoral fellows are not employees and therefore are not eligible for employee benefits, there is a disincentive to accept postdoctoral fellowship awards as such acceptance leads to a loss of employee benefits without any compensating increase in economic income. The supplemental stipend will address this inequity.

All PFs receive the Supplemental Stipend. For fellowships that do not include funds for health insurance coverage, the supplemental stipend is \$6,200. For fellowships that already include funds for health insurance coverage the supplemental stipend is \$1,600.

The Supplemental Stipend is provided in the PF's paycheck and is taxable income. The Supplemental Stipend was calculated assuming purchase of the lowest cost coverage options for an individual for health, dental, group life and long term disability insurance. It also includes the cost of the income tax that will be incurred as a result of receiving the Supplemental Stipend and the cost of a 2.5% employer retirement contribution (see **Retirement** below). The faculty who accept the PF into his/her research laboratory will provide the Supplemental Stipend. PFs have total discretion in their use of their Supplemental Stipend.

Health Insurance

All PFs are required to have health insurance coverage during the term of the fellowship. The University of Chicago offers the following health insurance coverage to PFs: Maroon Plan or HMO-IL BlueCross BlueShield. PFs have no access to University of Chicago Health Plan as a non-employee. PFs can purchase health insurance from vendors not provided by The University of Chicago and some PFs have found more affordable health insurance from these alternative providers.

Dental Insurance

The University of Chicago offers PFs dental insurance through MetLife Dental only. PFs can alternatively purchase dental insurance from vendors not provided by The University of Chicago.

Group Life Insurance

The University of Chicago offers PFs term life insurance through The Standard Insurance Company only. PFs can alternatively purchase term life insurance from vendors not provided by The University of Chicago.

Long Term Disability Insurance

The University of Chicago offers PFs long term disability insurance through The Standard Insurance Company only. PFs can alternatively purchase long term disability insurance from vendors not provided by The University of Chicago.

Payment Method for Coverage provided by The University of Chicago

- If the PF is supported by a NIH NRSA fellowship or Training Grant that includes funds for health insurance, then coverage is paid via form 62 and will be charged directly to the Training Grant or NIH NRSA fellowship. The fellowship money will therefore not increase the PF's taxable income.
- All other PFs pay for coverage via payroll deduction. The Supplemental Stipend or fellowship money used to pay for coverage must be received in the PF's paycheck to enable payroll deduction and will therefore increase the PF's taxable income.

Payment Method for Coverage not provided by The University of Chicago

- Any PF who purchases coverage from vendors not provided by The University of Chicago will pay for that coverage themselves after tax and not via payroll deduction or form 62. The Supplemental Stipend or fellowship money used to pay for such coverage must be received in the PF's paycheck to enable the PF to pay the vendor and will therefore increase the PF's taxable income.

Retirement

As non-employees, PFs do not receive retirement contributions from the University and may not contribute to University retirement funds. Instead, PFs may, if they desire, purchase an IRA (Individual Retirement Account). The Supplemental Stipend includes the cost of a 2.5% employer contribution as is received by postdocs who are employees. Payments to retirement accounts may not be made through a payroll deduction. The Supplemental Stipend or fellowship money used to pay for such accounts must be received in the PF's paycheck to enable the PF to pay the vendor and will therefore increase the PF's taxable income.

Appointment Length

PF appointments are generally for a 12 month term.

Term Limit

PFs are limited to a maximum of 5 years of postdoctoral experience at The University of Chicago and elsewhere. Their PhD must have been awarded within the last 5 years.

Leave Policy

PFs receive 4 weeks paid vacation and 15 days paid sick leave per 12 month term. This time may be used as parental leave. As non-employees, PFs are ineligible for Family Medical Leave Act, Short/Long term disability or Leave of Absence.

Income Taxes and F.I.C.A.

- For U.S. citizens, permanent residents, and resident aliens, The University of Chicago is not required to withhold income taxes or deduct F.I.C.A. contributions (Social Security taxes), from the stipends and supplements. Each Fellow should file a declaration of estimated tax (IRS Form 1040-ES and Illinois, IL-1040-ES) and pay quarterly installments of the tax on the stipends and supplements (and any other taxable income). Failure to file the declaration will subject the fellow to interest on any under-payment of tax when he/she files an annual tax return.
- For non-resident aliens, The University of Chicago is required to withhold alien federal taxes at the rate of 14% from the fellowship stipends and supplements. Federal taxes will not be withheld if the Fellow claims and qualifies for a tax treaty exemption.

Visa Restrictions

PFs may be citizens/permanent residents of the United States, or foreign nationals who hold an F-1 or J-1 BCIS visa classification, dependent on the specific criteria of the fellowship award. As H-1B visas are employment-based visas, postdocs with an H-1B visa status may not be appointed as a PF, they must receive a salary and be appointed as a Postdoctoral Scholar or Research Professional Associate.

University Housing

PFs are eligible for University Staff/faculty and student housing. However, PFs are ineligible for the Employer-Assisted Housing Program and Staff Loan Programs.

Laboratory Schools Tuition Benefit

PFs are ineligible for Laboratory Schools Tuition Benefit.