

FAS Postdoctoral Fellows' Handbook

Faculty of Arts & Sciences (FAS), Harvard University¹

Welcome!

Postdoctoral scholars (postdocs) come to Harvard University for further training in their chosen discipline under the general supervision of one or more Harvard faculty members. The FAS and SEAS recognize that postdocs are critical engines to our research and educational enterprise, contributing significantly to the discovery and creation of new knowledge, and helping to guide the research of undergraduate and graduate students. Accordingly, the FAS/SEAS is committed to supporting their research and broader professional training and their efforts to develop to the fullest of their abilities. Postdoctoral Fellows and Research Associates are not faculty, staff, or students, but researchers in training.

The Faculty of Arts and Sciences Office of Postdoctoral Affairs, [FAS PDO](#) supports all postdoctoral fellows and Research Associates in the FAS Divisions of Arts & Humanities, Social Science, and Science, and in the Harvard John A. Paulson School of Engineering & Applied Sciences. For the purposes of this handbook, the term “postdoc” includes both Postdoctoral Fellows, who have recently completed a Doctorate, and Research Associates, who ordinarily have already pursued at least three years as a postdoctoral fellow.

Postdocs should devote their fellowship to learning new techniques, mastering new experimental systems, revising dissertations for publication as journal articles or book-length manuscripts, and generally strengthening their ability to carry out independent research.

The mission of the PDO is to facilitate postdoctoral training beyond the scholarly training provided by faculty mentors, by providing and coordinating a wide range of academic and professional development activities. These activities help to develop the professional skills needed to succeed in or beyond academia. The responsibilities of the PDO include being available for individual consultations, coaching on job applications, advising on resources, answering questions from postdocs and departments, and building community in partnership with the FAS Postdoctoral Association (PDA).

A comprehensive list of [resources](#) is available on the FAS Office of Postdoctoral Affairs website, notably an [“Arrival Checklist.”](#)

¹ Please note the following legal disclaimer: The FAS Postdoctoral Fellows' Handbook provides general policy guidelines for Postdoctoral Fellows in the Faculty of Arts & Sciences. It does not constitute a contract of employment or promise of any kind. The University may change these guidelines unilaterally and without notice, although every effort will be made to provide adequate notice of any significant change. Harvard also reserves the right to determine the applicability of any policy to a particular situation and to depart from the guidelines contained herein in a given case.

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A comprehensive list of [resources](#) is available on the website of the FAS Office for Postdoctoral Affairs.

ADMINISTRATIVE CONSIDERATIONS

Categories of Researchers

FAS policy applies to all categories of postdoctoral fellows, irrespective of their funding source. For the purposes of this handbook, the term “Postdoc” applies to research scholars who have recently completed a doctoral degree and are temporarily engaged in research in the FAS/SEAS. This includes four categories of researchers:

- “Employee” postdocs, who are supported by research grants and contracts or internal Harvard funding under the direction of a Harvard Principal Investigator;
- Stipendiary postdocs, who receive a fellowship that is managed by Harvard University. In this case the fellow is paid through Harvard;
- External postdocs, who are paid directly by an external entity and are, therefore, not paid through Harvard;
- [Research Associates](#), who, ordinarily, have had at least three years of postdoctoral experience and are continuing their research under the general supervision of one or more faculty members.

In university documentation, postdocs are often covered under the term “researchers.” Postdocs are not covered under faculty, staff, or students. However, if you see a policy that covers only faculty, staff, and students, please inquire about whether it also applies to postdocs by contacting Stephen Kargère, Director of the FAS Office of Postdoctoral Affairs (kargere@fas.harvard.edu)

Appointment Letter

When a faculty member offers a postdoctoral appointment to a candidate, the offer letter should conform to the [template](#) provided in the FAS Appointments and Promotion Handbook. In order for the appointment to be processed, the letter must be accompanied by the [documents listed](#) in the Handbook.

The letters of appointment and renewal should indicate whether the mentor has available funding to fulfill the terms of the appointment; if not, the letter should indicate the duration of assured funding. When the appointment is to be coterminous with external funding, research grant, contract, training grant, etc., this fact should be included in the letter of appointment, including the end date of the funding, even if renewal is expected.

Proof of Doctoral Degree

Eligibility for appointment as a postdoctoral fellow requires a candidate to hold, or to have completed the requirements for, an advanced degree, e.g., Ph.D., M.D., or equivalent. Requirements of doctoral degree verification are described in the [FAS Appointments Handbook](#).

Duration of Appointment

Postdoctoral appointments are ordinarily for one year and may be renewed annually up to a maximum of five years, subject to satisfactory performance and availability of funding. At the end of their postdoctoral appointment, postdocs may then be reclassified to [Research Associate](#), an annual appointment that may be renewed for up to five years.

Stipend/Salary Level

The appointment may be on Harvard payroll (“paid”) or funded independently (“unpaid”).

According to section C2, “Salary,” of the [FAS Appointments Handbook](#),

Paid appointments may be as employee postdoctoral fellows (when the postdoctoral fellow is supported by research grants and contracts under the direction of a Harvard Principal Investigator) or as stipendiary postdoctoral fellows (when a fellowship is awarded to a postdoctoral fellow and is managed by Harvard University, with the fellow paid through Harvard). For further guidance on stipendees, please see the “Research Appointments Matrix,” available on the ["Appointment and Promotion"](#) page of the FAS website for faculty and researchers.

In AY 2022-2023 prior to January 1, 2023, the minimum base salary for a postdoctoral fellow was \$52,000. Effective January 1, 2023, this base salary minimum must follow the [NIH scale](#), and the starting salary for a postdoc with no prior experience will be \$54,840. For all new hires of postdoctoral fellows, their previous postdoctoral experience should be considered and their salary pegged to the appropriate level on the NIH scale.

For postdoctoral fellows hired before January 1, 2023, this change to follow the [NIH scale](#) will take effect upon their next annual reappointment or by July 1, 2023, whichever date comes first. The salary minimum continues to apply to both internal and external postdoctoral fellows.

Positions unpaid through Harvard include those on fellowships that are paid directly to the fellow and those on the payroll of another institution. If the postdoctoral appointment is unpaid through Harvard, the candidate must have external funding that meets the minimum base salary requirement of \$54,840 (for postdocs with no prior experience) or the appropriate step on the [NIH scale](#). Personal funds may not be used (in full or in part) to meet this requirement.

According to Section D2, “Salary, of the [FAS Appointments Handbook](#),

In AY 2022-2023 prior to January 1, 2023, the minimum base salary for a research associate was \$52,000. Effective January 1, 2023, this base salary minimum for newly hired research associates (assuming 5 years of postdoctoral experience) will change to \$61,992 (or step 6 on the [NIH scale](#)) and must subsequently follow the NIH scale. For research associates hired before January 1, 2023, this change to follow the [NIH scale](#) will take effect upon their next annual reappointment or by July 1, 2023, whichever date comes first. The salary minimum continues to apply to both internal and external research associates. This position can only be paid as salaried with benefits; it cannot be paid as a stipend.

Any postdoc or research associate who believes that they are paid less than the FAS salary minimum should contact [Stephen Kargère](#), Director of the FAS Office of Postdoctoral Affairs. If you have any questions, you may also reach out to your Assistant Dean for Faculty Affairs or Zoe Fonseca-Kelly, Senior Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs.

POLICY

Rights and Responsibilities of Postdoctoral Fellows and Faculty Mentors

While postdoctoral fellows are responsible for their career trajectory and progress, faculty mentors are expected to help their postdocs achieve their goals, by initiating and providing on-going mentoring, guidance, and resources, in both scientific and career development. Mentors/PIs should schedule regular conversations to review research direction and progress as well as career goals. Postdocs are encouraged to request these conversations, if they are not otherwise taking place.

i. Work Conditions

The work conditions of postdoctoral fellows should support and enhance their research and professional training. This objective may be compromised if postdoctoral fellows are overworked, or if their research and professional training are compromised for any reason.

Inappropriate work conditions include, but are not limited to:

- Demanding excessive or inappropriate hours of work;
- Preventing a postdoc from moving to another position;
- Using intimidation and threats, for example by using visa renewal, recommendations, or authorship decisions as leverage.

In addition, all postdocs and mentors should abide by FAS and Harvard University policy, notably:

- [Authorship Disputes](#)
- [Discrimination](#)
- [Retaliation](#)
- [Sexual and Gender-based Harassment](#)
- [Intellectual property](#), notably the policy protecting the traditional rights of scholars with respect to the products of their intellectual endeavors.
- Anti-Bullying (Draft policies available [here](#), page 10 and following).

ii. Expectations for Faculty Mentors

a. Develop in consultation with their mentee

- A mutually satisfactory research project or scholarly program.
- A career plan. A useful tool in this regard is the Individual Development Plan (IDP), available [here](#), which should be initially filled out by the mentee, updated at least once a year, and serve as a basis for discussion at least once a year.

b. Encourage their postdocs to

- Present their work and publish their results in a timely fashion;
- Acquire and enhance their knowledge and technical skills, as dictated by their current and future needs;
- Participate in career development activities (workshops, courses, conferences), complementing their scientific research training, including teaching opportunities, as appropriate;
- Apply for training and research support, as appropriate;

c. Meet regularly with their postdocs to discuss progress in their research;

d. Provide constructive, respectful feedback'

e. Provide an annual review of performance;

f. Provide career counseling and mentoring to help their postdocs reach their career objectives;

g. Give postdocs time to participate in professional training programs;

h. Give proper credit and attribution for postdoc intellectual contributions to projects;

i. Provide appropriate work conditions for postdocs. See above.

iii. Expectations for Postdoctoral Fellows

Postdocs have obligations to their faculty mentor, the group in which they are working, the Department/Area with which they are associated, the sponsor whose funds support them, and the University. These obligations include, but are not limited to:

- a. Conscientiously fulfilling their research, scholarly, and teaching responsibilities, as applicable;
- b. Conforming to ethical standards in research and scholarship;
- c. Complying with good scholarly practice, including the maintenance of adequate research records.
- d. Communicating with their faculty mentor openly and regularly on the status of the research and notifying their faculty mentor of any change in plans;
- e. Discussing with their mentor the possession or distribution of tangible property such as materials, reagents, and the like;
- f. Discussing with their PI laboratory records or scholarly materials, if relevant;
- g. Disclosing to their PI prior to the event any scholarly information, findings or techniques proposed for dissemination privately, at scholarly meetings, or in publications;
- h. Behaving collegially with all members of the Harvard community;
- i. Complying with all applicable University policies, some of which are mentioned below. A comprehensive list of policies can be found on the [Provost website](#).

Sexual and Gender-Based Harassment Policy

The FAS/SEAS is committed to maintaining a safe and healthy educational and work environment in which no member of the FAS/SEAS community is, on the basis of sex, sexual orientation, or gender identity, excluded from participation in, denied the benefits of, or subjected to discrimination in any University program or activity.

Harvard University has adopted a Sexual and Gender-Based Harassment Policy, which applies to all Harvard students, faculty, staff, postdocs, Harvard appointees, and third parties. [Find out more HERE.](#)

FAS Title IX Coordinators are listed [here](#). Postdocs should contact the Title IX coordinator for Faculty and Researchers

Instructions for filing a complaint can be found [here](#).

Harvard University Policy on Drugs and Alcohol in the Workplace

The University's policy on drugs and alcohol in the workplace is designed to address the University's concern for the health and well-being of its employees, and to ensure that the Harvard community complies with the federal Drug-Free Workplace Act of 1988 and the Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act Amendments of 1989. [Complete policy.](#)

Research Policies & Compliance

A comprehensive list of resources on [Research Policies & Compliance](#) is available on the website of the Harvard University Office of the Vice Provost for Research.

Research Misconduct Policy and Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) Training

The in-person Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) course is open to all Harvard-affiliated individuals and offered in Cambridge twice a year—in January and in August. The course is eight hours long, with significant researcher facilitation and administrative support, and uses discussions and case studies to examine basic ethical and regulatory requirements for conducting research. RCR is a highly recommended “best practices” course for those desiring to deepen their knowledge of ethical research and responsible conduct. It is also an excellent professional opportunity for anyone interested in furthering a career in research. While this particular course is not mandatory, it fulfills the National Science Foundation (NSF) and National Institutes of Health (NIH) requirements for formal RCR instruction.

Topics covered include research misconduct; responsible authorship and publication; mentor-mentee relationships; conflicts of interest; peer review; data acquisition and management; ownership of data and biological samples; and collaborations. [More information](#) available here.

The FAS policy on research misconduct—“Interim Policy and Procedures for Responding to Allegations of Research Misconduct”—can be found [here](#).

Outside Activities—Consulting Activities

Postdoc involvement in outside activities, notably consulting, is subject to the following requirements:

- Consulting agreement: Must include a signed copy of the [Harvard consulting addendum](#), which should then be sent to the compliance unit of the FAS Research Administration Office, at this address: OutsideActivities@fas.harvard.edu.
- No use of Harvard resources: No Harvard facilities or other resources may be used in doing outside consulting work, and this work must be done on a postdoc's own personal time.
- Cannot engage in consulting activities during Harvard 100% appointment on sponsored awards: If the postdoc is expending 100% of their effort on sponsored awards, they are not permitted to engage in outside consulting.
- Update Conflict of Interest (COI) disclosure: If in the reporting population (e.g., NIH or NSF “investigators”), postdocs will need to update their disclosure in <https://fcoi.harvard.edu/> to include consulting effort and salary.
- COI management plan if engaged with faculty member’s startup company: The COI management plan requires the Divisional/SEAS Dean’s signature as well as a disclosure to lab members/peers.

On- and Off-Campus Teaching.

Postdocs may teach, provided appropriate conditions are met. In every case, this requires

- Written approval from the faculty member for whom the postdoc is working.
- In the case of international postdocs, prior clearance from the Harvard International Office/SEAS Office for Faculty Affairs. Please note that postdocs on H-IB visas may not teach, unless already included in the terms of their visa.
- In the case of external grants, seeking permission from the granting agency.

The FAS considers teaching a course to require 25% of an instructor’s time during the regular year. If the course is co-taught with another faculty member, or as a Teaching Assistant, the portion of effort and salary devoted to teaching is lower. Teaching is ordinarily in addition to their full-time research responsibilities, although FTE level and pay for research appointments may be reduced during postdoc teaching periods to lower the total FTE.

1. Postdocs who are funded by their PI from sponsored funds or are on postdoctoral fellowships that are funded by the federal government, notably T32 traineeships and F32 fellowships, may teach, provided that the compensated services
 - Occur on a limited, part-time basis apart from the normal research or training activities and
 - Do not interfere with, detract from, or prolong their approved training program or research project. In every case, the research training experience must remain paramount and the PDF and his or her PI or mentor must ensure that the teaching does not jeopardize the quality or quantity of time devoted to the research training.
 - Is relevant to their training as a scientist-educator and is not being undertaken merely to supplement their stipend or to help a department cover its teaching responsibilities.
2. College Fellows.
Teaching duties are part of their training program and their compensation.

Termination and Postdoc Notice of Resignation

Postdocs are expected to provide at least one month's notice of resignation. When appropriate to the discipline, it is the obligation of the postdoc to ensure that all research materials and records are left in a state to allow continuation of the project.

In the case of early contract termination due to unsatisfactory performance, the FAS Appointments Handbook describes the process and documentation required [here](#).

Ordinarily, a minimum of 3 months' notice of the nonrenewal of a Postdoctoral Fellow or a Research Associate appointment will be expected, except in extraordinary circumstances.

Paid Time Off

All full-time postdocs on annual appointments (as opposed to appointments under one year), and whether paid by Harvard or not, and all Research Associates are entitled to:

- 20 days of paid vacation per appointment year. (Paid vacation for partial year postdoc appointments are prorated accordingly.) This provision is already included in the template postdoc offer letter.
- All University holidays with the proviso that, should a postdoc be required to work on the holiday due to the research group/lab schedule, an alternative day off should be given at another time agreed with the faculty supervisor. Please also note that, should the lab be closed during the winter break, this will count towards the 20 days of paid vacation.
- Sick days: Sick leave may be taken as needed, up to 12 business days of sick leave per year (equivalent to one day per month). Time off for illness or family matters may also be covered under the MA PFML or FMLA.
- Death in the Family: 3 days.

Please note, that:

- These policies apply to postdocs, including Research Associates, who serve on a 12-month basis. If an appointment is less than full time, vacation and sick times are prorated.
- Unused vacation days, bereavement days, or sick days do not carry over from year to year.
- There is no payout of unused vacation, bereavement, or sick time when an appointment ends.
- All vacation must be approved by your PI in advance.

Leaves

Leaves policies are described on the FAS Office of Postdoctoral Affairs [website](#). Forms of leave include MA Paid Family Medical Leave (MA PFML), leave under the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA), and Personal Leave.

- Sick leave may be taken as needed, up to 12 business days of sick leave per year (equivalent to one day per month).
- If illness extends beyond 10 business days (2 weeks), documentation from a physician may be required to qualify for short-term disability coverage (in the case of Harvard benefits-eligible postdocs).
- Any unused sick leave at the end of the appointment year does not carry over into the following year, except in the case of time off for illness or family matters that may be covered under the MA PFML or FMLA.

Benefits, including Health Insurance

To be eligible for Harvard's health and welfare benefits, you must be employed on a regular University payroll and work at least 17.5 hours per week, or be paid by Harvard at a base annual rate of at least \$15,000. Postdocs who do not receive a paycheck from Harvard at a base annual rate of at least \$15,000 are not Harvard benefits eligible.

For legal reasons, by definition only Harvard benefits-eligible have access to benefits offered by Harvard, for example [commuter](#) benefits and the courses offered by the [Center for Workplace Development](#). However, all FAS/SEAS postdocs, including those who are non-benefits-eligible, have access to the Harvard libraries, the [Harvard Credit Union](#), and Harvard athletic facilities (for a fee).

If you have further questions about your status, contact your department administrator or, for SEAS postdocs, the SEAS Office for Faculty Affairs. For further questions, call the Benefits Office directly at 617 496 4001.

All benefits available to Harvard benefits-eligible postdocs, including health insurance, can be found on this [page](#) with relevant links.

Health insurance for Harvard non-benefits-eligible postdocs (paid directly by an outside entity) can be found [here](#).

Please note that, health insurance is legally required in Massachusetts.

Taxes

Virtually all postdoc fellowships funded from U.S. sources are subject to income tax, both state and Federal. However, some fellowships and traineeships are not subject to automatic tax withholding. This is most often true with "direct-paid" fellowships—fellowship stipends that are paid directly to the postdoc by an external funding agency—although it is sometimes the case with fellowships that are paid through Harvard.

Those fellowships without automatic tax withholding are still subject to the IRS requirement that income tax be paid on a regular basis throughout the tax year, and not all at once at the end of the year. Thus, postdocs without withholding should make estimated tax payments each quarter in order to avoid a penalty.

Postdocs on fellowships must also file a tax return between January 15 and April 15 for the previous tax year. Postdoc fellows and trainees may receive a W-2 or 1099-MISC Form reporting their total fellowship income, or they may receive no summary form at all.

Further information on taxes is available on the [postdoc website](#).

RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO FAS POSTDOCS

A comprehensive list of [resources](#) is available on the website of the FAS Office for Postdoctoral Affairs. These include the [Anonymous Reporting Hotline](#), Benefits, Financial Resources, Housing, Leaves, Medical Services, Resources for Parents, Social Support, Support Services, Taxes and Loans, and Visas.

Additional resources for help:

- i. [Harvard Ombuds Office](#), which helps resolve workplace and/or academic issues
- ii. FAS [Title IX resource coordinators](#), who also handle professional conduct issues.
- iii. The office of the [Associate Dean of Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging](#) for issues of discrimination, and for SEAS postdocs, [Alexis Stokes](#), Assistant Dean for Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging.