



# TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY HEALTH SCIENCES CENTER EL PASO

## Operating Policy and Procedure

### HSCEP OP: 70.29, **Employment of Postdoctoral Research Fellows**

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of this HSCEP OP is to define policies relating to the hiring, supervision and development of Postdoctoral Research Fellows at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso (TTUHSCEP) hired after July 1, 2016; to acknowledge the process necessary to advance the competence of a person who has recently completed higher professional training marked by a doctoral degree; to promote excellence in the quality of research performed at TTUHSCEP; and to enhance compliance with TTUHSCEP's employment policies and practices.

**REVIEW:** This HSCEP OP will be reviewed by March 1 of each even-numbered year (ENY) by the Vice President for Research (VPR), School Deans, and the Assistant Vice President for Human Resources, with recommendations for revision submitted to the Chief Financial Officer or designee.

### **POLICY:**

#### **1. Definitions.**

- a. **Postdoctoral Research Fellow.** A postdoctoral research fellow ("Postdoc") is, as defined by the National Postdoctoral Association, NIH and NSF: *"An individual who has received a doctoral degree (or equivalent) and is engaged in a temporary and defined period of mentored advanced training to enhance the professional skills and research independence needed to pursue his or her chosen career path."*
  - i. This operating policy applies to any individual appointed to this position classification regardless of title including, but not limited to, "postdoctoral scholar," "postdoctoral fellow" and "postdoctoral research associate."
- b. **Employment Status.** Postdocs are considered to be staff employees and are eligible for all applicable benefits. However due to the unique, temporary and training nature of the position, it is not intended to be an open-ended position. The position represents an opportunity for the individual to acquire skills and experience to prepare for a full-time academic and/or research career. The position may be full-time or part-time depending on the needs of the department.
- c. **Employee at Will.** TTUHSCEP recognizes the essential role Postdocs play in the scholarly mission of the research initiatives of the institution. All Postdocs serve at the will of TTUHSCEP.

Continuation of employment at TTUHSC El Paso is at the discretion and will of the institution. In this employment-at-will relationship, the employee or TTUHSC El Paso may sever the relationship at any time at either's discretion.

- i. Job performance deficiencies which fail to meet expectations should be documented by the faculty mentor/supervisor and reviewed with the Postdoc.. Reasonable opportunity to improve deficiencies and maintain satisfactory performance should be allowed; however failure to meet satisfactory work performance may result in corrective action including and up to termination under TTUHSCEP OP 70.31.

- ii. For Postdocs in an education training program, to start their training they will need to provide either their diploma or a letter from their training director stating all the requirements for the program are completed and the postdoc will have their degree conferred within 3 months of TTUHSC El Paso employment. If a diploma cannot be provided within 3 months of starting the TTUHSC El Paso postdoctoral program, the postdoc's employment will be terminated. Employment as a Postdoc is not considered permanent position. The maximum term of appointment for a Postdoc is five years from the award date of their doctoral degree (or equivalent) inclusive of experience obtained outside of TTUHSC. In exceptional circumstances a one-year extension may be granted but must be approved in writing by the Department Chair at least three (3) months prior to the end of the fifth year of employment.
- iii. Nothing in this operating policy constitutes a contract, a contractual relationship or a guarantee of continued employment for a specified period of time.
- iv. A Postdoctoral position is not intended to be or become a long term career path. However, a post-doctoral position could serve as a stepping stone to other career-path positions such as faculty member or staff scientist.

**2. Criteria or Eligibility for Postdoc Employment.** Postdoc employment is characterized by the following conditions:

- a. The appointee was recently (within the last four years) awarded a Ph.D. or equivalent doctorate (e.g., D.Sc., M.D.). For Postdocs that require visa sponsorship the duration of the visa sponsorship and immigration history may impact appointment term. Additional costs associated with early termination of employment may impact the sponsoring department.
- b. The appointment involves conducting research or scholarship at the discretion of the mentor.
- c. The Postdoc appointee works under the supervision of a TTUHSC employed faculty member (faculty mentor).
- d. The appointee is expected to publish results of the research they have conducted and/or scholarship accomplished within the mentor's laboratory at the discretion and behest of the mentor.
- e. The appointment is considered preparatory for a full-time academic and/or research career but does not constitute a binding contract or agreement of permanent employment.

**3. Postdoc Term Limitation Policy.**

- a. Initial Postdoc appointments at TTUHSC are renewed annually at the discretion of the faculty mentor with prior approval of the Departmental Chair or equivalent provided the renewal of the appointment will not extend the appointee past five years from the date they were awarded their doctoral degree (or equivalent).
- b. Requests for appointment of a Postdoc employee beyond five years from the date they were awarded their doctoral degree (or equivalent) must be approved by the Department Chair at least three (3) months prior to the end of the fifth year of employment. Consideration for extension will be based upon compelling exceptional circumstances only.
- c. The term of appointment refers to **total** time spent in conducting research after receiving the doctoral degree (or equivalent), including prior postdoctoral positions at other institutions. However, it does not include documented time spent away from research such

as maternity/paternity leave, military service, etc.

**4. Postdoc Salaries.**

- a. The minimum salary level for a Postdoc employment at TTUHSCEP is established in the TTUHSCEP Pay Plan.

Postdocs with external salary funding which requires or allows for a higher rate salary level will be funded at that rate. If the Postdoc continues employment beyond the expiration of such external funding their salary may not be reduced.

**5. Hiring Process.** A Postdoc position shall be filled by conducting a search following HSCEP OP 70.11. Appointments to Non-Faculty Positions. Job requirements are established by the department subject to approval of the dean and must be in accordance with TTUHSCEP policy as specified below.

- a. Completion of a doctoral degree in the appropriate discipline is required except where otherwise stated in this policy. The doctoral degree must have been completed within the four years immediately preceding the first date of appointment as a Postdoc.
- b. To be appointed as a Postdoc, candidates with foreign doctoral degrees must provide an Education Credential Evaluation regardless of the type of visa for which the candidate is applying. Course-by course evaluation is not required, but an evaluation of the diploma is required.
- c. Formal offer letters of employment are issued to the Postdoc candidate via Human Resources as per HSCEP OP 70.11 (Appointments to Non-Faculty positions).
- d. The hiring manager is responsible for ensuring the prospective Postdoc meets all eligibility requirements and qualifications prior to the commencement of appointment.
- e. Reimbursement or payment of moving/relocation expenses to TTUHSCEP is **not** authorized for Postdoc appointments.

**6. Training and Development.** The intent of the Postdoc experience is to be considered a professional training opportunity.

- a. The goal of the training is to *prepare* individuals to follow scientific careers that draw on their unique, in-depth education and expertise in research. Additionally, the experience is to:
  - i. Provide advanced research training beyond the doctoral degree.
  - ii. Prepare individuals to follow academic and/or research careers.
- b. A successful training experience is the responsibility of the Postdoc and faculty mentor. Postdocs must demonstrate high levels of productivity, initiative, and commitment to research excellence.
- c. The Postdoc must complete all required compliances and training by established deadlines as mandated by TTUHSCEP policy.

**7. Equal Opportunity Employment.** All appointments shall be on the basis of qualifications and suitability without regard to race, color, religion, sex, age, genetic information, national origin, or status as a protected veteran or individuals with disabilities and in keeping with the laws and

regulations of the State of Texas and Texas Tech University (TTU) System Board of Regents Regents' Rules, Section 03.01.09, Equal Employment Opportunity and all federal Laws. Ethnicity, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, or status as a protected veteran.

**8. Faculty Mentor Responsibilities:**

- a. Engage the Postdoc in meaningful research activities and projects.
- b. Meet regularly to discuss performance outcomes, address deficiencies in a timely manner, and allow opportunity to improve deficiencies and meet satisfactory work performance standards.
- c. Encourage presentation of the Postdoc's work internally, and presentation and scholarly publication externally with due recognition.
- d. Provide career guidance and assist the Postdoc in setting realistic career goals.
- e. Provide a formal annual review of project/career progress at the same time that annual performance reviews are due in accordance with HSCEP Op 70.12, 'Staff Performance Management', to determine if project/appointment will continue. If the project/appointment will be discontinued, the faculty member must receive prior written approval from the Department Chair, and then provide the appointee at least three (3) months written notice of termination. The formal annual review must be attached to the annual performance evaluation electronically.
- f. Provide mechanisms for the Postdoc to provide feedback to the Department Chair on the quality of mentoring.
- g. Ensure the Postdoc's awareness of and compliance with institutional policies and mandatory training requirements.
- h. Recognize that the Postdoc is part of the TTUHSCEP community with responsibilities and opportunities that transcend the specific laboratory of appointment.

**9. Right to Change Policy.**

TTUHSCEP reserves the right to interpret, change, modify, amend, or rescind this policy in whole or in part at any time without the consent of employees. Nothing in this policy shall be construed as a contract between TTUHSCEP and its employees or agents.