

Protecting the Postdocs



Rules about the nature and length of postdoctoral appointments.

A common salary or stipend scale.

Mandatory health insurance.

Provisions for time off, sick leave, annual reviews, and grievances.

*T*hese are among the areas covered by a new UC Office of the President policy for postdoctoral scholars—1,100 of them at UCLA alone.

While UCLA has enjoyed “a postdoc friendly administration,” says Eileen Anderson-Fye, a postdoctoral fellow who serves on UC and UCLA policy-making committees related to her peers. “I believe this policy has the best interests of postdocs at heart.”

The UC document is intended to provide a general framework and core requirements regarding postdocs, although individual campuses will have some discretion in how to achieve UC’s goals.

“The idea is to bring some consistency, equity, and fairness to the process,” says Associate Dean of the Graduate Division John V. Richardson, Jr., who is responsible

for policies affecting postdoctoral scholars and visiting scholars at UCLA.

For example, the new policy specifies that postdoctoral scholars should normally receive full-time appointments. In the past, some prospective postdocs from overseas may have accepted less than full-time salaries while working more than full-time hours, simply for the opportunity to study in the United States. These instances will no

longer be approved, Dean Richardson says, although some exceptions to the full-time policy may be granted for reasons related to sickness or family demands.

The UC policy also imposes a five-year limitation on the length of service as a postdoctoral scholar—at any campus—to preserve the nature of these appointments. Postdoctoral positions are intended to provide “a chance to learn in a laboratory or

Kyle Cunningham is coordinator of postgraduate research appointments at UCLA, handling salary, health insurance, and other matters related to postdoctoral scholars. “Because of Kyle, who is a tireless advocate for us, UCLA is one of the leaders in the system” when it comes to serving the interests of postdocs, according to Eileen Anderson-Fye, who is UCLA’s representative to the UC Council of Postdoctoral Scholars, a systemwide organization.



other environment with a senior scholar, and the idea is that you go on to start your own lab, have your own career,” Dean Richardson says. People who have become integral to a research project should be hired as staff researchers, he adds.

The salary range stipulated in the new UC policy will have relatively little impact on UCLA postdocs, according to Kyle Cunningham, the Graduate Division’s coordinator of postgraduate research appointments. UCLA’s salary levels exceed the \$29,000 minimum UC establishes. The impact of benefit requirements will vary.

Most postdocs at UCLA apply directly to departments and are funded through the research budgets of faculty who are principal investigators. In the past, they have received their salaries through the UCLA Payroll Department, which made them eligible for the vacation, sick leave, health

insurance, and pension benefits available to all employees. Postdoctoral employees appointed in this fashion before July 1, 2004, will be allowed to continue in this manner.

More changes will be felt by those postdocs who receive individual fellowships directly from outside funding agencies—the National Institutes of Health is one—and choose to do their work at UCLA. In the past, these postdoctoral fellows were paid through the Graduate Division and received health insurance through a special program the Division established, with premiums usually—but not always—paid through their grant. They had no guaranteed vacation or sick leave time and no pension participation. The new system means they will now be entitled to the same health insurance coverage given to the postdoctoral employees, time off during intersession and recess periods (totaling about four weeks),

and leaves related to sickness and other personal issues.

All postdocs appointed after July 1, 2004, will receive the same benefits just described. The benefits would be equalized to the extent possible under Federal and State laws.

The new UCOP policy also requires that mentors conduct annual reviews with postdoctoral scholars, discussing their progress and career potential. In the past, UCLA recommended but did not require such reviews. Whether the UC-mandated reviews will need to be in writing is undecided. “We don’t want this to be an additional task for faculty mentors,” Cunningham said.

The UC grievance policy for postdocs is also likely to have little campus impact. “Thankfully, we don’t have to deal with many grievances at UCLA,” Cunningham said. Only two were filed and processed during the 2002-2003 academic year.

An administrative goal of the UC policy is to achieve a more accurate accounting of how many postdoctoral scholars work and study on UC campuses. While the Graduate Division keeps central records at UCLA, not all campuses do so. Even the UCLA data may not reflect the latest information available at the department level.

To obtain more accurate data, the UC policy asks that all UC postdocs be appointed through the central campus payroll system, using three new title codes that reflect their funding source. This would make current data readily available to sponsoring departments, the Graduate Division, and the Office of the President. At UCLA, the practical implementation of administering postdoctoral appointments in this manner is still under discussion.

So far, there have been relatively few questions regarding the new policy, Cunningham says, and most of these have come from departments rather than from the postdocs. “I like to think they’ve been quiet because they’ve been well cared for,” he says.

POSTDOCTORAL SCHOLAR INFORMATION ON THE WEB

For more information about the new UCOP Postdoctoral policy and other information for postdoctoral scholars, visit the following web pages:

Graduate Division website for Postdoctoral Scholars
www.gdnet.ucla.edu/postdocs.html

Academic Personnel Policy (APM 390)
on Postdoctoral Scholars
www.ucop.edu/ucophome/coordrev/policy/5-29-03.html

UC Council of
Postdoctoral Scholars
postdocs.ucdavis.edu/uccps.htm





Eileen Anderson-Fye, founding president of the UCLA Society for Postdoctoral Scholars

THE UCLA SOCIETY FOR POSTDOCTORAL SCHOLARS

As the academic year begins this fall, there's a new organization on campus: the UCLA Society for Postdoctoral Scholars, headed by founding president Eileen Anderson-Fye.

Inspired by her own experiences as a new postdoctoral fellow in 2002, Dr. Anderson-Fye volunteered to serve on the UC Council of Postdoctoral Scholars, a systemwide organization. There she learned that UCLA was one of only two campuses that had no organization for postdocs.

Why not? she asked herself. The reason, it turned out, is that Kyle Cunning-

ham, the Graduate Division's coordinator for postdoctoral issues, has been doing a great job. "Many other places don't have an advocate for postdocs on campus, so the organizations have developed to advocate for themselves," she says.

But as she asked around at UCLA, she found there were other needs. For example, postdocs are hungry for information on career development. Some expressed an interest in social events that would offer an opportunity to meet their peers elsewhere at UCLA.

So the Society begins. Although advocacy will not be a primary function, at least for now, Dr. Anderson-Fye is hoping to recruit a small group of postdocs

who are interested in policy. One might succeed her as UCLA's delegate to the UC Council, but others are needed "to make sure there's a postdoctoral scholar's voice on major committees both at UCLA and UC."

Among other projects, the Society is developing an orientation package for postdocs that should be available by Winter Quarter. It will also help organize a Graduate Division survey of postdoctoral scholars, which will probably get under way in Fall 2004.

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