



# TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY HEALTH SCIENCES CENTER EL PASO

## Operating Policy and Procedure

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

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of this HSCEP OP is to define policies relating to the hiring, supervision and development of Postdoctoral 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 Executive Director for Human Resources, with recommendations for revision submitted to the Chief Financial Officer or designee.

### POLICY:

#### 1. Definitions.

- a. **Postdoctoral Fellow.** A postdoctoral scholar ("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 regular 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 extended 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. However, all employees serve at the will of TTUHSCEP.
  - i. In this employment-at-will relationship, the employee or TTUHSCEP may sever the relationship at any time at either's discretion but TTUHSCEP will make every effort to provide three (3) months written notice if they are the severing party.
  - ii. Job performance deficiencies should be documented by the faculty mentor and discussed with the Postdoc at any time that they occur, along with methods to correct the deficiencies, but this in no way is intended to create an agreement between the Postdoc and TTUHSCEP. TTUHSCEP OP 70.31 is to be followed in this situation.

- iii. Employment as a Postdoc is for no fixed or definite term. However 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 TTUHSCEP. In exceptional circumstances a one-year extension may be granted but must be approved in writing by the Department Chair and by the VPR at least three (3) months prior to the end of the fifth year of employment.
- iv. Nothing in this operating policy constitutes a contract, a contractual relationship or a guarantee of continued employment for a specified period of time.
- v. A Postdoctoral position is not intended to be or become a long term career path.

**2. Postdoc Appointments.** Postdoc appointments are 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 faculty members that hire foreign nationals that require visa sponsorship, please note that the duration of the visa sponsorship and prospective postdoc's immigration history might impact appointment term and the sponsoring department could incur additional costs associated with early termination of employment.
- b. The appointment involves substantial research or scholarship.
- c. The appointee works under the supervision of a TTUHSCEP employed faculty member (faculty mentor).
- d. The appointee is expected to publish the results of the research or scholarship accomplished.
- e. The appointment is viewed as preparatory for a full-time academic and/or research career.

**3. Postdoc Term Limitation Policy.**

- a. Initial Postdoc appointments at TTUHSCEP 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 and by the VPR at least three (3) months prior to the end of the fifth year of employment.. Consideration 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 appointment at TTUHSCEP is established in the TTUHSCEP Pay Plan.
  - i. For a Postdoc whose external salary funding requires or allows for a higher rate salary level they 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. Requests for approval to create new postdoctoral research positions must have prior approval of the VPR.
  - b. Completion of a doctoral degree in the appropriate discipline is required. The doctoral degree must have been completed within the four years immediately preceding the first date of appointment as a Postdoc. An exception to the requirement of completion of the doctorate in the past four years can be made in situations where it can be demonstrated that the individual is changing fields.
  - c. 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. The evaluation does not need to include a course-by course evaluation but simply an evaluation of the diploma itself.
  - d. Only the VPR has authority to sign the offer letter. Faculty members who discuss a potential position with candidates should advise the candidate that no offer is final until the letter is received from the authorized signatory.
  - e. All letters of offer of employment shall be issued on a form provided by the Office of the VPR and require an authorized signature by the VPR or his/her designee. A copy of the signed letter of offer shall be sent to the Human Resources Department to be scanned into the Postdoc's personnel file.
  - f. The hiring department is responsible to confirm that the prospective Postdoc meets all eligibility requirements prior to the commencement of appointment.
  - g. Reimbursement or payment of moving 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 scientific careers.
  - b. The primary responsibility for a successful training experience lies with the Postdoc and the faculty mentor. Postdocs must demonstrate high levels of productivity, initiative, and commitment to research excellence.
  - c. The Postdoc must complete all ethics training mandated by the Office of the VPR, and other training required of TTUHSCEP employees.
7. **Equal Opportunity Employment.** TTUHSCEP will not discriminate against any applicant for employment, employee training and development, or other employment actions because of race,

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. Discuss performance expectations with the Postdoc and meet regularly to discuss performance outcomes and effectively address deficiencies.
- 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. Supervise 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.