



To: Provost's Council on Research

From: Dawn Bonnell

Re: Fall 2023 Updates Related to Postdoctoral Researchers at the University of Pennsylvania

Date: September 7, 2023

With the many changes to the postdoctoral experience at the University of Pennsylvania in the past year, the OVPR is reaching out to clarify some of these changes.

The update includes:

- **Summarized guidance on the five-year cumulative term limit for newly appointed postdoctoral researchers and fellows**
- **The Office of Postdoctoral Affairs: A summary of role and responsibilities**
- **Application process for the 2024-2025 Provost's Postdoctoral Fellowship Program**

We appreciate your time and attention. Questions or concerns can be directed to Marta Bartholomew (martalei@upenn.edu), director of research programs and communications.

Summarized guidance regarding the cumulative five-year term limit for newly appointed postdoctoral researchers and fellows

As stated in the [policy](#), the "cumulative postdoctoral trainee experience" includes previous postdoctoral research experience completed at Penn or another institution for the cumulative "five years total." The new term limit of cumulative five-years' experience only applies to postdocs **starting at Penn on or after July 1, 2023**.

Full guidance on the five-year term limit can be found on the [OVPR website](#).

Please note the key takeaways regarding the five-year term limit:

- There are two options for postdocs nearing their term limit to move into a staff position to continue their research at Penn. Both options, Research Associate or Senior Research Investigator, are exempt from posting. [Please see full guidance for details](#). **The process for transitioning to a staff position should begin at least six months before the end of**

their postdoc appointment. Failure to begin the process of transitioning to a staff position in a timely manner will not be justification for an extension.

- Faculty mentors or PIs, or a staff delegate assigned to manage the appointment of a postdoctoral researcher, are responsible for determining the years of previous experience and the number of years a postdoctoral researcher is eligible for postdoctoral training at Penn.
- The guidance outlines three circumstances in which time or experience does not need to be included when calculating the five-year term limit:
 - If a postdoc continues in the lab or department of their PhD advisor for the year following the successful defense of their dissertation to complete additional projects related to their dissertation work
 - If a postdoc that has completed a dual MD-PhD degree, time spent in a clinical fellowship after the completion of their degrees
 - Any time spent in a prolonged period of leave prior to their experience at Penn (including parental leave, sick leave, etc.)
- The number of years a postdoc will be eligible for postdoctoral training at Penn should be communicated to the postdoc before they begin their appointment.

Faculty mentors and PIs are welcome to reach out to the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs for further guidance if needed.

In addition to the five-year term limit, please note that requests for a 6th year extension for any postdoc, regardless of their start date, **will only be approved for extraordinary circumstances.** **Extension requests related to pandemic related research disruption will generally not be considered.**

An Introduction to the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs

The Office of Postdoctoral Affairs (OPA) was established in Spring 2023 under the umbrella of the Office of the Vice Provost for Research (OVPR). The office is managed by the Director of Research Programs and Communications with support from the OVPR Program Coordinator. Leadership and oversight are provided by the Senior Vice Provost for Research.

The Office of Postdoctoral Affairs (OPA) focuses on the following areas:

- Leadership and facilitation regarding campus-wide initiatives and policy concerning the postdoc community across campus
- Management and oversight of the Provost's Postdoctoral Program

- Creating a more equitable experience for postdocs across campus by promoting and supporting best practices (e.g., promoting the use of individual development plans)
- Serving as a central liaison and administrative representative of postdoctoral affairs to bolster communications among the schools and throughout the postdoc community
- Community building through programming (e.g., new postdoc orientation event) and communications (e.g., a monthly newsletter and website)
- Partnering with and supporting the activities of Biomedical Postdoctoral Programs and postdoctoral associations on campus

Typically, the individual aspects of a postdoc’s training are managed directly by the department and faculty mentor. Departments should make a strong effort to communicate with their postdocs on how to navigate questions and concerns. Appointments for biomedical postdocs are managed by Biomedical Postdoctoral Programs. Appointments outside of the biomedical sciences are managed by the department or school.

Below is a high-level summary of the primary organization that is typically responsible for various aspects of the postdoc experience. Please direct questions or concerns to the primary organization.

Questions or concerns related to:	Please contact for further guidance:
Management of postdoc appointment and appointment letter	School or department
Management of postdoc appointment and appointment letter – biomedical only	Biomedical Postdoctoral Programs
Individual Development Plan or Performance Evaluation	PI, faculty mentor (if biomedical, in conjunction with BPP)
Provost’s Postdoctoral Fellowship Application or Funding	Office of Postdoctoral Affairs
University-wide policy concerning postdocs	Office of Postdoctoral Affairs
Conflict resolution	PI, Department Chair
Conflict resolution (PSOM only)	Biomedical Postdoctoral Programs
Formal grievance complaint	Dean or designee (see Postdoc Policy)
Short term extension to 5-year term limit	BPP, School or department
One year extension to 5-year term limit	Initial review by BPP or School w/ final approval by the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs

Request for J1 visa exception for international postdocs	School (if independent appeal, approval needed from Office of Postdoctoral Affairs)
Request for J1 visa exception for international postdocs – biomedical only	Biomedical Postdoctoral Programs
Benefits for Postdoctoral Researchers or Fellows	Penn Human Resources
Benefits for NRSA Fellows	Gallagher Benefits Services

The 2024-2025 Provost’s Postdoctoral Fellowship for Academic Diversity

The Provost’s Postdoctoral Fellowships for Academic Diversity seek to attract promising researchers and educators from different backgrounds, races, ethnic groups, and other diverse populations whose life experience, research experience, and employment background will contribute significantly to Penn’s academic and research missions. Fellowships are available for postdoctoral training in all areas of study at Penn.

Currently, fellows receive a stipend of \$65,000 in year one, with increases of \$2,000 in years two and three, as well as annual allowances for travel and research (\$6,000) and, if eligible, a one-time relocation allowance of \$5,000. The University also provides a benefits package through Penn Human Resources.

Successful candidates will receive highly mentored scholarly and research training, as well as workshops to enhance their research and professional success skills. Penn graduate students who are completing their doctoral programs and looking for postdoctoral positions are eligible to apply for fellowships starting July 2024.

The application deadline is November 3, 2023. Complete details about the program can be found at <https://research.upenn.edu/postdocs-and-students/penn-provosts-postdoctoral-fellowships/>

Please note that fellowships are funded in partnership between the postdoctoral fellow’s host school and the Office of the Provost. Questions should be directed to Marta Bartholomew, director of research programs and communications (martalei@upenn.edu).

Save the Date: National Postdoc Appreciation Week

September 18, 2023 – September 22, 2023