

Guidelines for Postdoctoral Appointments

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Background

The postdoctoral experience emphasizes scholarship and continued training for individuals who have recently completed a doctoral degree. Postdocs conduct research under the general oversight of a faculty mentor in preparation for a career in academe, industry, government, or the nonprofit sector. Postdoctoral work provides essential training that may include opportunities to enhance teaching and other professional skills.

Postdocs contribute to the Georgia Institute of Technology (Georgia Tech) community by enhancing the research and education programs. They bring expertise and creativity that enrich the research and educational environment for all members of the university community, including graduate and undergraduate students. Georgia Tech strives to provide a stimulating, positive, and constructive experience for the postdoc, by emphasizing the mutual commitment and responsibility of the institution, the faculty, and the postdoc.

This document defines terms and guidelines related to postdocs at Georgia Tech. Additionally, postdocs are subject to all other applicable Georgia Tech and University System of Georgia (USG) policies and procedures. The Office of Postdoctoral Services, in collaboration with the Office of Academic and Research Faculty Affairs, is responsible for periodically reviewing the guidelines for revisions as needed, and taking active steps to encourage compliance with the guidelines.

Throughout this document, "postdoc" is used as an inclusive, general term. Italics are used when referring to specific position titles, such as *Postdoctoral Fellow*, *Postdoctoral Scholar*, and *Brittain Fellow*.

Definitions

The definition of postdoc used by Georgia Tech includes the following criteria:¹

- The appointee has received a Ph.D. or equivalent doctorate (e.g., D.V.M., Sc.D., M.D.), typically within the past 5 years, in a field directly related to the appointee's assigned responsibilities;
- The assigned responsibilities of the appointee are substantially research and/or scholarship but may combine these responsibilities with significant formal instructional responsibilities (typically no more than 50% effort);
- The appointment is full time, limited term (recommended to be 1-3 years, with a maximum of 5 years); and
- The appointment is viewed as preparatory for a full-time career in academia, industry, government, or the nonprofit sector.

Under the definitions in the [Georgia Tech Faculty Handbook](#), many postdocs are either non-tenure-track Academic Faculty or Research Faculty, depending on the appointment. However, neither of the two types provides for faculty governance voting rights, due to the temporary nature of postdoctoral appointments.

¹ Based on the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology definition of postdoctoral fellows.

Georgia Tech currently uses the following appointment types and titles. A summary table comparing the details of each appointment type is provided below.

Postdoctoral Fellow – *Postdoctoral Fellows* are usually funded from Georgia Tech-administered grants, contracts, or funds and for the purposes of services and benefits are considered employees of Georgia Tech. *Postdoctoral Fellows* receive compensation for services defined by the sources of the corresponding Georgia Tech administered grants, contracts, or funds. Appointment as a *Postdoctoral Fellow* can include responsibilities in formal instruction (typically less than 50% effort). *Postdoctoral Fellows* are considered to be Research Faculty without voting privileges.

Postdoctoral Scholar – *Postdoctoral Scholars* primarily have training status; they are not considered Academic or Research Faculty. They are provided a stipend for which no specific service to Georgia Tech is required in exchange for the stipend. The stipend may be provided directly to the recipient from an external source or provided by Georgia Tech from an external source (e.g., a federal training grant).

Academic appointments – If instructional responsibilities are significant, postdocs may be appointed as non-tenure-track Academic Faculty, with an appropriate title. Examples of academic appointments include *Postdoctoral Teaching Fellows*, *Brittain Fellows* in the School of Literature, Media, and Communication and postdocs within the School of Mathematics who are appointed with the title *Visiting Assistant Professor*.

Expectations

Georgia Tech has the following set of expectations of postdocs:

1. Adherence to ethical standards, which, prior to assuming duties, includes a background check (per USG Board of Regents Policy);
2. Conscientious discharge of assigned duties;
3. Collegial conduct toward coworkers;
4. Compliance with good research practices and recognized Georgia Tech standards;
5. Open and timely discussion with the supervisor regarding research progress, distribution of reagents or materials, or any disclosure of findings or techniques privately or in publications;
6. For appointees with formal instructional responsibilities, active participation in training and assessment activities related to instructional duties;
7. Publication of research and/or scholarship during the period of the appointment, in consultation with the mentor;
8. When leaving Georgia Tech, provide the faculty supervisor with as much notice as possible and leave behind the appropriate data, computer files, and tangible research materials; and
9. Compliance with all sponsor, Georgia Tech, and USG policies and procedures, including observation of established guidelines for research involving biohazards, human subjects, or animals, and successfully completing any mandatory trainings or workshops (e.g. Ethics Module and Responsible Conduct of Research training).

The postdoc should be supervised by a faculty member in the unit to which the appointee is assigned. Georgia Tech has the following set of expectations of faculty supervisors:

1. Provides guidance on the postdoc's research and scholarship goals, as well as the postdoc's overall career development;
2. Helps the postdoc acquire knowledge and skills based on their current and future needs;
3. At the time that training begins, provides the postdoc with a written description of assigned duties and expectations together with a description of the goals and objectives of the training program;
4. Regularly and frequently communicates with the postdoc about expectations and goals for assigned duties and projects;
5. Provides written assessments of the postdoc's performance at least annually (required by USG Board of Regents Policy and Georgia Tech);
6. Communicates any changes in funding or support that could affect the length of the appointment to the postdoc as soon as possible.

Appointment Procedures

The unit in which a postdoc is appointed is responsible for ensuring that appropriate procedures are followed and complete files are established at the time of appointment. All appointment packages should include official transcripts issued to Georgia Tech and showing the doctoral degree completion. For current postdocs who are transferring to another unit or starting a new postdoctoral position or for previous postdocs that are returning to Georgia Tech for a new postdoctoral appointment, units are required to submit a new offer (check with the unit Human Resources contact for guidance on what is required). All postdoctoral appointments are approved by the Office of Faculty Affairs. Faculty Affairs maintains centralized records for all academic and research appointees as well as anyone with instructional duties.

Postdocs may teach courses and be instructor of record, if an agreement is reached between the postdoc, the faculty mentor, and the academic unit. Faculty Affairs grants grading privileges on a case-by-case basis using the process detailed here: <http://faculty.gatech.edu/faculty-affairs-reps/banner-access>. Faculty Affairs ensures that the [SACS-COC Faculty Credential Guidelines](#) are followed and maintains centralized records of credentials for all instructors, including official transcripts issued to Georgia Tech.

All postdocs must obtain a Georgia Tech Buzzcard, providing access to physical facilities and online services, including access to libraries, parking, etc. All must complete the online Ethics and Haven (sexual assault prevention) training modules, and other trainings and certifications as required by Georgia Tech, USG, and/or funding agencies. Postdocs must complete Responsible Conduct of Research Training if appointed to an applicable NIH or NSF project (see the [RCR Compliance Policy](#)).

Postdoctoral Fellows, Postdoctoral Teaching Fellows, Brittain Fellows, and postdocs with other academic appointments must follow all Georgia Tech employment procedures, which include completing payroll and benefits forms (as detailed on the [Georgia Tech Office of Human Resources web site](#)).

Postdoctoral Scholars will be entered into Georgia Tech's personnel system so that their affiliation with Georgia Tech is established. The scholar will sign the [Postdoctoral Scholar Volunteer Agreement](#) before onboarding at the Office of Human Resources.

Term of Appointment

The typical term of appointment for postdoctoral positions at Georgia Tech is between one and three years. The recommended maximum term of appointment for postdocs is five years. This term limit is based on federal guidelines and the tenet that all postdoctoral appointments are primarily for training, which has a natural limited duration. The term refers to the total time spent at Georgia Tech as a postdoc and does not include time spent at Georgia Tech as an undergraduate or graduate student or as a postdoc at other institutions. The term may be interrupted for extended medical or family leaves.

The unit in which a postdoc is appointed should ensure that the appointment term does not exceed five years (or the term specified in the offer). If the maximum term of appointment is reached, an appointee should be moved into a regular position or separated with a minimum of thirty days' notice. Regular positions appropriate after a five-year postdoctoral appointment may include, but are not limited to:

- *Research Scientist/Engineer II* – these are Research Faculty positions in which research activities comprise the majority of the employee's effort. These positions may be appropriate for a postdoc who remains with the same research group beyond the training period. A *Research Scientist/Engineer II* may act as a Principal Investigator (PI) in submitting proposals for research funding.
- *Lecturer* or *Instructor* – these are non-tenure-track, Academic Faculty positions appropriate for those seeking to pursue an academic teaching career. *Lecturers* and *Instructors* are appointed within units following standard faculty search and appointment procedures and meet the [SACS-COC Faculty Credential Guidelines](#).

All reassignments of postdocs should follow standard USG and Georgia Tech faculty affairs and human resource policies and procedures. Exceptions to the term of appointment must be requested to the appropriate cognizant office (EVPR or Provost).

Ending the Appointment

Postdoctoral appointments may be terminated with a thirty-day notice by either party. In addition, appointments may be terminated at any time with a minimum:

- thirty days' notice if the funding support ends;
- two weeks' notice for failure to adhere to the expectations described above; or
- no notice in cases where ethical or compliance standards have been violated.

If Georgia Tech sponsors the visa of a postdoc and the employment ends prior to the original dates requested, the Office of International Education (for J1 visas and F1-OPT authorized by Georgia Tech) or Global Human Resources (for H1B, F1-OPT authorized by other institutions, and other visas) must be contacted *prior* to informing the postdoc of termination.

A postdoc may resign his or her appointment by submitting a written statement to the immediate supervisor. Thirty-days' notice before the end date is standard, and as much time as is possible is preferred. When leaving Georgia Tech, the postdoc should also contact the Human Resources representative for the unit to ensure that all of the correct steps are taken.

Evaluation

Recognizing that postdocs are in growth positions and striving for professional advancement, they are entitled to formal evaluations by their faculty mentors. USG Board of Regents and Georgia Tech policy (see [Faculty Handbook section 3.1.2 Faculty Salaries and Evaluations](#)) specify that written performance evaluations must occur on at least an annual basis.

In addition, use of [Individual Development Plans \(IDP\)](#) is strongly recommended by Georgia Tech as well as some funding agencies. The Individual Development Plan is created by the individual postdoc to identify professional development goals and career objectives, and can serve as a tool to communicate these goals between the postdoc and the mentor(s). While the IDP may inform the postdoc's performance evaluation, it should be noted that these documents have different purposes; the IDP is written by the postdoc to outline his/her own progress and goals, while the performance evaluation is the supervisors' assessment of the postdoc's efforts.

Compensation

Georgia Tech believes that postdocs should be compensated at a level appropriate to their advanced education and training, as well as their value to the research enterprise. Georgia Tech requires that all full time *Postdoctoral Fellows* and research faculty members be paid at least \$47,476 per year (\$3,956.33 per month). In some disciplines, market rates and/or guidance by external funding agencies suggest higher minimum rates and in those cases, our recommendation follows that guidance (e.g., in the biological sciences, the National Institutes of Health publishes NRSA stipend levels).

Georgia Tech strongly encourages linking performance evaluations to annual salary raises when feasible based on funding. When possible, an annual escalation of postdoc salaries should be written into the budget of grant applications.

For *Postdoctoral Scholars*, the terms of the award dictate the stipend amount and any increases; these are outside the jurisdiction of Georgia Tech. Stipends may be supplemented by the supervisor or unit, if allowable under the terms of the award. Stipends and stipend supplements usually need to be provided via Georgia Tech Accounts Payable, if not provided directly from the sponsor to the individual, and reported on a 1099 form to comply with federal tax regulations. Requests to provide fellowship recipients with a part-time salary for services rendered that are separate from the fellowship obligations will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Leave

Postdoctoral Fellows, Postdoctoral Teaching Fellows, Brittain Fellows, and postdocs with other academic appointments accrue 14 hours per month of paid annual leave and 8 hours per month of sick leave under Georgia Tech's [Time Away from Work Policy](#). *Postdoctoral Scholars* are eligible for the amount of leave allowed under the terms of the fellowship or award.

Health Insurance

Postdoctoral Fellows, Postdoctoral Teaching Fellows, Brittain Fellows, and postdocs with other academic appointments are eligible for Georgia Tech's employee health insurance plans, subject to USG policies (see USG benefits eligible definition: http://www.usg.edu/hr/manual/employee_categories). In rare cases where a postdoc is appointed at less than 75% effort (less than 30 hours per week), then the hours worked must be tracked and that will determine health benefits eligibility, if any.

As *Postdoctoral Scholars* receive a stipend from an external source, they are not eligible for employee benefits per USG policy. *Postdoctoral Scholars* may acquire their own health insurance or may choose to participate in the [voluntary student health insurance plan](#) (known as SHIP). To enroll in the voluntary student health insurance plan, *Postdoctoral Scholars* must contact the Office of Postdoctoral Services.

Retirement Program

Postdoctoral Fellows, Postdoctoral Teaching Fellows, Brittain Fellows, and postdocs with other academic appointments have the option of participating either in the Teachers Retirement System (TRS) of Georgia or an Optional Retirement Plan (ORP). Upon initial appointment, the postdoc should talk with an Office of Human Resources benefits counselor to determine the appropriate plan given the temporary nature of their appointment.

Postdoctoral Scholars can use institutional administrative allowance funds provided with the award to make voluntary payments into other individually selected retirement plans only when sponsors allow such expenditures. No institutional retirement contributions can be made. No institutional administrative allowance funds in a Georgia Tech restricted account can be transferred to the *Postdoctoral Scholar's* retirement account without verification that the sponsor permits such payments from such funds. Verification must be provided through the Office for Sponsored Programs (OSP) to the Accounts Payable Office before transfers can take place.

Other Benefit Issues

The [Employee Assistance Program](#) is available all postdocs, including *Postdoctoral Scholars* (even though *Postdoctoral Scholars* are not eligible for other employee health benefits). This program provides no-cost, 24-hour access to confidential counselling for a range of personal, family, and work concerns.

International postdocs should check with the Office of International Education (if holding a J visa) or Global HR (if holding an H1B, F, or other visa) for assistance with questions regarding taxes and fringe benefits, and how they will be treated under federal law (i.e., social security, etc.).

For *Postdoctoral Scholars*, the institutional administrative allowance provided by the sponsor should be used by the appointment unit to support allowable benefits-related expenses. Refer to the award terms and conditions. Expenses not covered by this institutional allowance are the responsibility of the appointment unit and/or the *Postdoctoral Scholar*.

Check the summary table comparing details of appointment types provided at the end of this document.

Conflict Resolution & Grievances

Postdocs may consult with the Faculty & Graduate Student [Ombuds](#) for confidential, neutral, informal, and independent conflict resolution. Postdocs are also encouraged to talk to their faculty supervisor, unit head, and/or school chair before filing an official grievance.

The Policy for Responding to Allegations of Scientific or Other Scholarly Misconduct is applicable to all postdocs (see [Georgia Tech Faculty Handbook](#) Section 5.7). The [Grievance Pathways document](#) details the appropriate contacts for additional issues.

Summary Table of Postdoctoral Appointment Guidelines

	<i>Postdoctoral Fellow</i>	<i>Postdoctoral Scholar</i>	<i>Postdoctoral Teaching Fellow or Britain Fellow</i>
Term of Appointment Recommended	1-3 years; 5 years maximum	1-3 years; 5 years maximum	1-3 years; 5 years maximum
Compensation/Stipend (Paid by)	Salary (Georgia Tech)	Fellowship Stipend (Direct from sponsor or via Georgia Tech)	Salary (Georgia Tech)
Minimum Compensation/Stipend	\$47,476/year (\$3956.33/month for 100% effort)	(Set by sponsoring agency)	\$47,476/year (\$3956.33/month for 100% effort)
Tax Reporting Form	W-2	1099	W-2
Tax Withheld by Georgia Tech	Federal and State	None for US Citizens and Permanent Residents	Federal and State
Georgia Tech Worker's Compensation Insurance	Yes	No	Yes
Background Check	Required	Required	Required
Health Insurance	Employee	StudentBlue insurance offered	Employee
Retirement Benefits	TRS or ORP (with employer match)	Not eligible	TRS or ORP (with employer match)
Annual Leave	14 hours/month	(Specified by sponsoring agency)	14 hours/month (none if on a 9-month contract)
Sick Leave	8 hours/month	(Specified by sponsoring agency)	8 hours/month
BuzzCard	Required	Required	Required
Access to Georgia Tech Services*	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ethics and Haven Training	Required	Required	Required
Eligibly to be PI on an Individual Postdoctoral Fellowship	Yes	Yes	Yes
Eligibly to be PI on a Research Grant	Can be Co-PI, if school chair or unit director approves	No	Can be Co-PI, if school chair or unit director approves

*Including access to the Employee Assistance Program, Library, Parking & Transportation, Office of Postdoctoral Services programs and services, etc.

Quick Reference Guide

This table provides links to many, but not necessarily all, of the policies and procedures that apply to postdocs at Georgia Tech.

SUBJECT	SOURCE
Academic and Research Faculty Definitions	Georgia Tech Faculty Handbook , Section 2. Faculty Governance
Appointment procedures - Academic (<i>Brittain Fellows</i> and other academic postdocs)	Faculty Affairs
Appointment procedures - Research (<i>Postdoctoral Fellows, Postdoctoral Scholars</i>)	Research Faculty Affairs
Benefits Eligibility	USG Policy on Employee Categories
Benefits Plans and Forms	Georgia Tech Office of Human Resources
Conflict Resolution	Ombuds Program
Ethics	USG Ethics Policy ; Georgia Tech's Code of Ethics
Export Control	Office of Research Integrity Assurance: Export Control
Granting Grading Privileges	Faculty Affairs ; SACS-COC Faculty Credential Guidelines
Grievance Pathways	Grievance Pathways document
Health insurance plan available to <i>Postdoctoral Scholars</i> and J-1 Exchange Visitors	Georgia Tech Student Blue Voluntary Plan
Individual Development Plans (IDPs) and Mentoring Resources	Postdoctoral Services
International Scholars – visas, tax information, etc.	Office of International Education (J visas) Global Human Resources (F, H1-B, and other visas)
PD/PI Eligibility	Research Administration Policies & Procedures, section 2.1.1 PI/PD Eligibility (note: “General Faculty” is an outdated term that been replaced by the Lists of Faculty Titles for Participation in Faculty Governance)
Performance Evaluations	Georgia Tech Faculty Handbook , Section 3.1.2
Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) Compliance Policy	Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) Compliance Policy
Scientific or Other Scholarly Misconduct	Georgia Tech Faculty Handbook , Section 5.7
Time Away from Work Policy	Policy Library: Time Away from Work Policy
Postdoctoral Scholar Volunteer Agreement	Postdoctoral Scholar Volunteer Agreement

