

Five-Year Term Guidelines for Postdoctoral Trainees and Mentor(s)

2016

**Created by: Postdoctoral Executive Committee
The Office of Postdoctoral Affairs
Postdoctoral Advisory Committee**

As per recommendations of the National Academy of Sciences (NAS), the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai (ISMMS) has implemented a policy that the postdoctoral training period should be limited to five (5) years. The goal of this policy is to support the timely and successful transition of postdoctoral fellows (postdocs) to the next stage of their careers. The purpose of the guidelines herein is to provide **transparency** for all ISMMS postdocs and principal investigators (PIs) regarding the rules and appeal procedures for the five-year limit. These guidelines were developed through the collaborative efforts of the Postdoctoral Executive Committee (PEC), the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs (OPA), and the Postdoctoral Advisory Committee (PAC), referred to as ‘The Committee’ herein.

Overview

As of April 1st 2016, all incoming ISMMS postdocs must adhere to the five-year limit. The Committee recognizes that implementation of this policy will require a transition period. At the onset of implementation of this policy, April 1st 2016, a **two-year grace period** will apply to all existing postdocs that have over three (3) years experience at ISMMS. The grace period will allow postdocs sufficient time to plan for the next step in their careers following implementation of the limit. Postdocs at ISMMS for a total of three (3) years or fewer as of April 1st 2016 will be expected to adhere to the five-year limit. Specific guidelines for PIs, postdocs, the OPA, and the Office of Career Services and Strategy (OCSS) to ensure successful implementation of this rule appear below. The procedure for a postdoc to apply for an extension to the five-year limit is also detailed below, should cases of genuine need arise.

I. Implementation Guidelines for the 5-Year Term

Principal Investigators (PIs)

In their employment offer letter, PIs must clearly state the initial term of appointment and length of current funding support. The ISMMS five-year limit policy must be made clear to incoming postdocs in their offer letter. **The five-year term includes years spent as a postdoc in any laboratory at ISMMS but not those at previous institutions.** The PI must perform an annual evaluation with any postdocs under her/his mentorship and complete an individual development plan (IDP) to formalize a concrete plan for transition at the end of the five-year period. As part of the annual evaluation PIs should ensure that postdocs are taking appropriate steps to seek training and career development opportunities available at ISMMS, and beyond.

Postdoctoral Fellows

A postdoc with more than three years experience at ISMMS on April 1st 2016 must be allowed time to plan for the next step in her/his career following implementation of the limit. All postdocs who have been at ISMMS for three years or longer will be given a **two-year grace period**, beginning in March 2016.

During their first three years, postdocs should actively seek ISMMS training and career development opportunities that are offered weekly and free of charge. A list of these opportunities is available on the OPA website. To that end, the postdoc code-of-conduct states that all ISMMS postdocs are entitled to 10% protected time for such activities. The Committee strongly recommends that postdocs seek a secondary mentor, or participate in the formal ISMMS Secondary Mentoring program, also available through the OPA website.

When considering promotion, a postdoc should educate her/himself about the fair market rate for salary and benefits for this level of employment at ISMMS and at other institutions so as to be prepared to negotiate an appropriate compensation package as well as full employee benefits (e.g. a benefits package that is matched by the institution). Many sources of information are available including seek information including the Office of Academic Development and Enrichment and departmental administrators.

Office of Postdoctoral Affairs (OPA)

Two years before a postdoc approaches the five-year limit (e.g., at the beginning of the 3rd year of training), the OPA will contact the postdoc, PI(s), and department administrator. The OPA will request **documentation of the postdoc's career-planning meeting** with the PI, secondary mentor, or career officer per the 2015 code of conduct. Postdocs for whom the **two-year grace period** applies (those at ISMMS longer than three years as of April 1st 2016) will be contacted in April 1st 2016, and must also provide documentation of a career-planning meeting describing their plan for transition by April 2018.

The OPA will provide information from the OCSS about this transition. The postdoc will receive a list of milestones for planning and executing a plan for promotion or employment outside of ISMMS from the OCSS. Included in these milestones is the institutional requirement that PIs and fellows must meet as part of the annual evaluation and complete an individual development plan (IDP) to formalize a concrete plan for the postdoc's transition.

The OPA is the first point of contact for any questions relating to the five-year limit and its implementation.

Office of Career Services and Strategy (OCSS)

The Graduate School's OCSS has developed a robust set of resources to assist fellows in developing their career options; the availability of these resources will be regularly conveyed to the fellows as the term-limit approaches. The director of career services, Ellie Schmelzer, PhD, may be contacted directly and appointments can be scheduled by contacting Carol Johnson (contact info provided below).

II. Extenuating Circumstances and Exceptions to the 5-Year Term

The Committee recognizes that there may be cases that require an extension to this five-year limit. Cases requiring extensions include, but are not limited to, the following:

- A confirmed career step with a delayed start date relative to the five-year limit;
- To finalize manuscript submission or revision to maximize research output;
- Extenuating circumstances, such as family medical conditions; unforeseen changes in family circumstances such as recent spousal/partner unemployment, bereavement, or pregnancy;
- Family Medical Leave Act recipients;
- Visa issuance delays that prevent the postdoc from working.

III. Procedure to Request an Exception to the 5-Year Term

Exceptions to the five-year limit will be made at the discretion of the Dean of the Graduate School, upon recommendation by the OPA. An exception will apply in instances where an extension is in the best interest of the postdoc and will support their professional development. However, an extension will not usually exceed more than 12 months in duration. Postdocs who believe they have a real need for an extension and are unable to obtain a promotion to instructor or equivalent alternative, must contact

Theresa Scarabino, Director of the OPA, to discuss their situation. Postdocs are encouraged to proactively plan for this transition and if they envision a serious barrier to completing their project they must discuss this with their PI and the OPA in a timely manner.

To apply for an extension: A postdoc must submit a formal request and documentation no later than 6 months prior to the 5-year deadline. The request must be submitted as a single spaced word document, no longer than 3 pages. The request should include:

- 1) the postdoc's name and department,
- 2) the PI's name and department,
- 3) a ½-page description of the scope of the postdoc's ongoing work,
- 4) a 1-page description of the reason for exemption request, with any supporting documentation,
- 5) a 1-page description of a proposed career plan should the extension be granted.
- 6) a ½-page signed statement from the PI affirming that they support the request for extension and have sufficient funds to support the postdoc for the requested time period.

Ms. Scarabino will respond to the request and establish an initial 1-on-1 meeting. If she finds the request for extension is appropriate, a full review will be conducted by the OPA. Decisions are at the discretion of the OPA and must be approved by the Dean of the Graduate School. A successful extension request will provide substantial evidence that the extension 1) is appropriate given the guidelines herein and 2) will advance the postdoc's career. **The OPA will consider issues of diversity and equity to promote retention of diverse talent.**

Note that a postdoc applying for an **extension due to a visa lapse must provide evidence of timely correspondence** with the International Personnel office. In all cases, postdocs must discuss changes to their visa status with International Personnel in a timely fashion (at least 3-4 months time for visa renewal/change) to avoid delays.

Conclusion

The Committee acknowledges that the five-year limit addresses just one of several recommendations put forward by the NAS to improve the postdoctoral experience that also include compensation and benefits, career development, mentoring and data collection. We look forward to continuing to advocate for and develop appropriate implementation plans to address these areas of concern at ISMMS. The policies herein should be evaluated on a regular basis (with next revisions posted by January 2017). These revisions should provide comparison to other prestigious NYC institutes and reflect data collected from ISMMS postdoc exit interviews.

References

ISMMS Postdoc Handbook:

<http://icahn.mssm.edu/education/postdoc/policies>

ISMMS Postdoc Code of Conduct:

<http://icahn.mssm.edu/education/postdoc/careers/mentoring>

Individual development plan (IDP) for Postdoctoral fellows

Postdoctoral trainees and their mentor(s) should draft an IDP at beginning of the postdoctoral appointment. IDPs serve a communication tool between postdocs and their mentors while highlighting important career objectives and the need for professional development. An IDP will allow both postdoc and mentor to assess both short-term and long-term careers goals and performance goals. The postdoctoral trainee should review the IDP annually with the mentor, together with a secondary mentor(s) outside the primary research group. Postdocs should assess their needs, compare to potential opportunities and revise these with the mentor. Mentors should be familiar with available opportunities and should be comfortable discussing these in a timely manner with postdoc trainee.

<http://www.faseb.org/portals/2/pdfs/opa/idp.pdf>

ISMMS Secondary Mentor Database for Postdocs:

<http://librarycf.mssm.edu/postdoctoralmentorship/portal.cfm>

Resources

The ISMMS Postdoc Executive Committee is a representative body for postdocs run by postdocs. It is supported and facilitated by the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs and the Office of Academic Enhancement and Mentoring, but is autonomous in every other way. The committee meets once a month, to address issues relevant for postdocs at ISMMS and discuss topics of scientific and professional development, as well as organizing a program of activities to facilitate scientific and social interactions. The mission of the Postdoc Executive Committee at ISMMS is to foster a sense of community among the postdoctoral research fellows at ISMMS; to advocate for and be the representative voice of the postdoctoral community at ISMMS.

Office of Career Services and Strategy:

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