

# Postdoctoral Scholars Handbook



*California Institute of Technology*

This handbook summarizes important Caltech principles, policies, and administrative procedures concerning Postdoctoral Scholars and Senior Postdoctoral Scholars. It may be modified from time to time as revisions or additions become necessary.

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# Chapter 1

## Rules and Regulations Concerning Postdoctoral Scholars and Senior Postdoctoral Scholars

### *Purpose of Caltech's Postdoctoral Program*

Postdoctoral and Senior Postdoctoral Scholars (Postdoctoral Scholars) form a vital part of Caltech's research community. Postdoctoral Scholars continue their professional training by engaging in research beyond their Ph.D. training, working under close supervision of one or more Caltech professorial faculty members, to advance human knowledge while adding to their own experience and education. Postdoctoral Scholars also contribute to the education of Caltech undergraduates and graduate students and are introduced to aspects of managing a research program at a high-caliber research institution.

### *Postdoctoral Scholar Status and Purpose of this Handbook*

Postdoctoral Scholars play an essential role in Caltech's research community. Caltech identifies Postdoctoral Scholars as a category distinct from faculty, staff, and students. Postdoctoral scholars are funded by various sponsors. As a result, some are Caltech employees and some are not. There are three types of Postdoctoral Scholar appointments:

1. Postdoctoral Scholar Research Associates perform research under programs supported through Caltech,
2. Postdoctoral Scholar Fellowship Trainees perform independent research funded by external grants or fellowships awarded specifically to support the Postdoctoral Scholar (including those administered by Caltech), and
3. Postdoctoral Scholar Teaching Fellows have teaching responsibilities and pursue their own research programs.

Postdoctoral Scholar Research Associates and Postdoctoral Scholar Teaching Fellows are Caltech employees. They receive a salary from Institute funds (such as grants and department accounts) and are eligible for employee benefits. Postdoctoral Scholars funded through Caltech fellowship programs may be stipend or salary-based. All Caltech funded Postdoctoral Scholar appointments will be converted to salary-based appointments effective October 1, 2020.

Postdoctoral Scholar Fellowship Trainees are non-employee appointments. They are paid a stipend from external funds (such as outside fellowships and NSRA training grants). Postdoctoral Scholar Fellowship Trainees are granted access to most Caltech benefit programs.

This handbook provides a comprehensive guide to rules specific to Postdoctoral Scholars at Caltech.

### *Intellectual Independence and Academic Freedom*

Caltech's policy is to help Postdoctoral Scholars develop their potential as independent scholars by providing them important measures of intellectual independence and academic freedom and by providing them appropriate recognition in publications and in other results of their research. In support of this, Caltech provides Postdoctoral Scholars a significant degree of intellectual independence and academic freedom in the performance of their duties, consistent with the research program of the professorial sponsor and Caltech's policies and procedures. However, Postdoctoral Scholars do not lead independent research programs and normally they do not act as principal investigators on grant or contract proposals. Exceptions to this policy require the approval of the relevant Division Chair and the Vice Provost. For more information, see the section on the Office of Sponsored Research in Chapter 7 of the Faculty Handbook.

### ***Academic Policies and Procedures***

Caltech's policies and procedures on academic issues such as technology transfer, responsible conduct of research, and sponsored research apply to the professorial faculty, research faculty, Postdoctoral Scholars, students, and staff. The policies and procedures on academic issues and sponsored research are found in Chapter 7 of the Faculty Handbook.

### ***Patents and Intellectual Property***

All Postdoctoral Scholars are required to sign the Institute's Patent and Copyright Agreement.

Postdoctoral Scholars generally have the same rights and responsibilities concerning patents, copyrights, and royalties as professorial faculty, research faculty, graduate students performing research, and staff. Policies and procedures governing these matters are covered in the Institute's Patent and Copyright Policies.

### ***Access to Data, Programs, and Samples***

Caltech does not place restrictions on the academic activities of Postdoctoral Scholars in their careers after they leave Caltech. If departing Postdoctoral Scholars require access to research data, documentation, computer programs, material samples, biological specimens, or other research materials which they helped develop while at Caltech, the faculty supervisor, Division Chair, and the Vice Provost will negotiate with the departing individual to provide continuing reasonable access to such materials, appropriate for the circumstances and consistent with (1) Caltech's legal requirements to maintain originals of such data and other results, (2) Caltech's rights to protect intellectual property, and (3) any confidentiality provisions associated with the materials. No materials may be removed without approval by the Caltech faculty supervisor, Division Chair, and the Vice Provost.

### ***Educational Programs***

Postdoctoral Scholars cannot take Caltech classes for academic credit but can audit courses free of cost at the Institute with permission of their professorial sponsor and the instructor. Instructions for auditing courses are provided in the Caltech Catalog. In addition, the Institute endeavors to provide occasional, informal programs of direct interest to Postdoctoral Scholars on career-oriented issues such as research funding, grant management, and scientific ethics. Postdoctoral Scholars are not eligible for reimbursement of tuition expenses for classes taken at other colleges and universities.

### ***International Postdoctoral Scholars***

Because of the temporary nature of their appointments, Caltech does not seek permanent residency for Postdoctoral Scholars. Information on this topic is available from Caltech's International Scholar Services.

### ***Appointments and Reappointments***

#### ***Terms***

All appointments must be sponsored or co-sponsored by a member of the professorial faculty and approved by the Division Chairs.

#### ***Fixed Term Appointment***

A Postdoctoral Scholar may be appointed to a fixed term for terms up to three years. A fixed term appointment will terminate at the end of the term unless renewed. Fixed term appointments that are terminated prior to the end of the appointment term will be subject to the notice requirements set forth in the Standards for Notice section herein.

#### ***Renewable Term Appointments***

A Postdoctoral Scholar may be appointed to a renewable term appointments. The initial term of the appointment is one year, renewable annually, for a maximum duration of three years. Two months written notice of renewal/nonrenewal is required prior to the expiration of the current one year term. If the appointment is not

renewed prior to the end of the term, the appointment will expire. Renewable term appointments that are terminated prior to the expiration of the appointment will be subject to the notice requirements set forth in the Standards for Notice section herein.

#### *Renewal of Appointments*

Fixed and renewable term appointments to rank of Postdoctoral Scholar can be renewed up to a maximum of six years. Time served in the ranks of Postdoctoral Scholar and Senior Postdoctoral Scholar combined cannot exceed a maximum of nine years.

#### *Full-Time Commitment*

Due to the intensity of commitment required of Postdoctoral Scholars, the Institute makes such appointments with an expectation that they will devote themselves full-time to the research and education programs they have established with their faculty sponsors. For that reason, Postdoctoral Scholar appointments are made on a full-time basis only. Scholars may hold no other concurrent appointments. In rare circumstances, and only with approval of the faculty sponsor, Division Chair, and Vice Provost, Postdoctoral Scholars may be permitted to take on additional assignments, the activities of which must be consistent with and supportive of their research. Also in rare circumstances, and only with approval of the faculty sponsor, Division Chair, and Provost, a Postdoctoral Scholar may participate in teaching with additional compensation. A temporary appointment as a lecturer is necessary for teaching.

#### *Promotion to Senior Postdoctoral Scholar*

Postdoctoral Scholars who have held this rank for a minimum of one year may be promoted to the rank of Senior Postdoctoral Scholar. The following documents are required for such appointments: curriculum vitae with publications and supporting memos from the faculty sponsor and Division Chair.

Persons who have held postdoctoral positions for a minimum of one year at other institutions may be appointed directly to the Senior Postdoctoral Scholar rank. For such appointments the following documents are required: curriculum vitae with publications and letters of reference, and memos from the faculty sponsor and Division Chair. The position may be held for a maximum of nine years at the Institute.

#### *Promotion to Research Assistant Professor*

Postdoctoral Scholars or Senior Postdoctoral Scholars may be promoted to Research Assistant Professor. Promotion from either position to Research Assistant Professor requires a divisional committee review that includes three external letters of reference and approval by the IACC.

#### *Salary/Stipend*

Minimum Postdoctoral Scholar salary/stipend is reviewed and determined each year by the Provost with the concurrence of the Institute Academic Council (IACC).

#### *Limitations*

1. Caltech graduate students may be appointed Postdoctoral Scholars for up to one year with Division Chair approval. Any appointment beyond the initial one-year period requires IACC approval for a term of up to two additional years. The total appointment as Postdoctoral or Senior Postdoctoral Scholar cannot exceed three years.
2. Completion of all requirements for a Ph.D. degree or its equivalent is required for all postdoctoral appointments. Candidates who have not completed their Ph.D. may be appointed temporarily to a visiting or non-academic position.

#### *The Standards for Notice*

While it is Caltech's expectation that every individual who receives an appointment as a Postdoctoral Scholar will be successful, there are circumstances when it is necessary to terminate an appointment in advance of its expiration date. Caltech has very high expectations of academic and research performance. In situations where academic or research performance is not at a level acceptable to the Institute, notice to a Postdoctoral Scholar subject to termination of an appointment prior to its expiration date is given in writing in accordance with the following standards:

1. For those who have been employed by Caltech for less than a year, the advance notice shall be three months;
2. For those who have been employed by Caltech at least one year but less than two years, the advance notice shall be six months, and
3. Those with two or more years at Caltech shall receive notice or such termination at least one year in advance.

In addition, in cases where termination of an appointment is for reasons involving academic or non-academic misconduct, termination may be immediate and without prior notice.

#### *Processes and Communication*

A faculty sponsor normally initiates a Postdoctoral Scholar's appointment or reappointment by submitting a nomination to the appropriate Division Chair. If the Division Chair approves the nomination, it is sent to Scholar and Staff Services in the Human Resources Department for processing.

Appointments and reappointments are communicated to each individual concerned by means of an official letter signed by the President or Vice Provost. The recipient must sign and return an acceptance copy to Scholar and Staff Services before the appointment can be effective.

#### *Completion of Postdoctoral Scholar Appointments*

Postdoctoral Scholars who complete their appointment in good standing will receive certificates, upon request, signed by their faculty sponsor, showing the start and end dates of their research experience (minimum of six (6) months) and a statement that the scholar has completed the period in good standing.

#### *External Teaching, Consulting, and Professional Activities*

Due to the level of commitment required of Postdoctoral Scholars, Caltech makes such appointments with an expectation that Postdoctoral Scholars will be devoted full-time to the research program they have established with their faculty sponsors. For that reason, Postdoctoral Scholar appointments are made on a full-time basis only. Scholars typically hold no other concurrent appointment(s) with outside entities. External teaching, consulting, and significant participation in other outside professional activities, may be allowed, on a case by case basis, provided the consulting activity (1) is limited in time and scope, (2) does not interfere with Caltech duties, (3) is disclosed and approved through the Caltech Conflict of Interest (COI) disclosure system, and accompanied by an approved Request for Outside Activity form signed by the professorial sponsor, (4) does not constitute a conflict of interest. Consulting for an organization in which the professorial sponsor has a significant involvement or significant financial interest requires a written research management plan by the faculty member and the approval of the Division Chair and the Vice Provost. When permitted, such activities are governed by applicable Caltech policies, administrative procedures, and personnel memoranda.

#### *Benefits*

The Benefits Office on campus is a component of Caltech's Human Resources Department and is responsible for the administration of the Caltech benefits program. Postdoctoral Scholars are eligible to participate in most plans available to Benefit-Based Employees and their Dependents. Premium cost sharing by Caltech (Caltech contribution) is provided to individuals who receive a salary from Caltech. Postdoctoral Scholars receiving a stipend from a Caltech fellowship program or who are funded directly from an outside funding source have access to Caltech's health, dental, vision, personal accident, medical evacuation and repatriation insurance plans. In some cases, a scholar's outside grant or fellowship may include funding for benefits coverage. Beginning October 1, 2020, to the extent that a Postdoctoral Scholar's outside grant or fellowship does not provide funding that covers the Caltech contribution for health, vision and dental coverage, the sponsoring faculty member will be responsible for funding all or any portion of the Caltech contribution not covered. Beginning October 1, 2020, Postdoctoral Fellows who are paid a stipend from a Caltech fellowship program will be converted to salary-based employees and will be eligible for premium cost sharing by Caltech.

The benefit details are available through the MyBenefits link at <http://access.caltech.edu>

### *Retirement Plan*

Postdoctoral Scholars who have completed two years of Eligibility Service and who have qualifying earnings (i.e. W-2 wages) will be eligible for participation in the Institute Base Retirement Plan. Details are available at <http://benefits.caltech.edu>

### *Paid Leave*

Vacation. Postdoctoral Scholar Research Associates and Postdoctoral Scholar Teaching Fellows are entitled to up to a maximum of 21 days of vacation per year (in addition to Caltech holidays) after they have spent nine months as a Postdoctoral Scholar at Caltech. Each year on the anniversary date of their eligibility for vacation, they will be credited with vacation not to exceed 21 days per year, and pro-rated if the appointment is for less than one year. Vacation time must be scheduled with and documented by the faculty sponsor. Unused vacation will be paid at the time of termination.

The availability of paid vacation for Postdoctoral Scholar Fellowship Trainees depends on their funding arrangement.

Sick Leave. Postdoctoral Scholar Research Associates and Postdoctoral Scholar Teaching Fellows receive 15 days of sick leave per year. A Postdoctoral Scholar's sick leave balance does not accrue, nor is it payable upon termination. The availability of paid sick leave for Postdoctoral Scholar Fellowship Trainees depends on their funding arrangement.

### *Leaves of Absence*

Pregnancy Leave. Postdoctoral Scholars of all three ranks are entitled to:

1. A minimum 6-week paid leave of absence for pregnancy-related disability with reinstatement guaranteed, unless the position ceases to exist. During such periods the Institute will continue its contribution toward medical insurance coverage for Postdoctoral Scholars receiving salary or stipends from Caltech. Caltech complies with California's Pregnancy Disability Leave Act.
2. Up to 12 weeks per year of unpaid family care leave after completion of required service (as defined by the Family Medical Leave Act) at Caltech. During such periods of absence the Institute will continue its contributions toward medical insurance coverage. Family care leave is permitted in connection with birth or adoption of a child, placement of a foster child, or serious illness of the scholar or the scholar's spouse or registered domestic partner, child, or parents. Reinstatement is guaranteed, unless the position ceases to exist for reasons unrelated to the leave.

Other Paid and Unpaid Leave. Postdoctoral Scholars may be entitled to other paid and unpaid leave and time away, for instance, Medical Leave, Intermittent Leave, Family Care Medical Leave, and Military Leave. Please refer to: <http://hr.caltech.edu/departments/disability-and-leave-administration-unit>

### *Tuition Exemption*

Children of Postdoctoral Scholars may attend the Institute as undergraduate students without payment of the tuition fee, subject to the following provisions:

1. The parent must be a full-time, benefit-based Caltech employee.
2. Each child must satisfy the regular entrance requirements of the Institute, whether for admission to the freshman class or to one of the upper classes by transfer from another institution of college rank;
3. Each child must maintain standards of scholarship and conduct considered satisfactory by the deans;
4. The children of eligible parents will continue to be eligible if the parent remains at the Institute and: retires under an established Institute retirement plan, or is on an approved paid leave of absence, or dies;
5. If a parent, whose children are receiving tuition benefits, ceases to be eligible for reasons other than retirement, being on an approved paid leave, or death, such tuition benefits shall cease; and
6. Children of employees may complete the term they are currently enrolled in if their eligible parent is on leave of absence without salary.

Children are defined as natural born, legally adopted, stepchildren, living at the same address as the employee, and foster children, provided that foster children have been living in the home of an employee, or have been supported primarily by the employee for at least three (3) years immediately prior to registration at the Institute.

Eligibility for tuition exemption does not exclude such undergraduate students from consideration, on the same basis as other undergraduates, for cash grants, which may be made to students of high scholastic standing upon demonstration of financial need.

### ***Scholar Services Office***

The Scholar Services office located in Human Resources office facilitates all on-boarding and administrative needs for Postdoctoral Scholars. Further details can be found at <http://hr.caltech.edu/departments/scholar-and-staff-services>

### ***Caltech Postdoctoral Scholars Office***

The Caltech Postdoctoral Scholars Office under the direction of the Vice Provost serves as a resource for Postdoctoral Scholars. Further details can be found at <http://postdoc.caltech.edu>

### ***Caltech Postdoctoral Studies Committee***

The Caltech Postdoctoral Studies Committee is chaired by the Vice Provost and comprises Faculty Representatives for Postdoctoral Affairs from each Division and representatives from Human Resources and the Caltech Postdoctoral Association. This committee meets quarterly to discuss issues related to Postdoctoral Scholars.

### ***Caltech Postdoctoral Association***

The Caltech Postdoctoral Association (CPA) is an affiliated group of Postdoctoral Scholars that seeks to foster a sense of community. Further details can be found at <http://cpa.caltech.edu>

### ***Conflict of Interest***

It is the policy of the Institute to avoid conflicts of interest and conflicts of commitment. There is a possibility of conflict of interest and commitment when a Postdoctoral Scholar engages in outside activities in addition to his or her work at Caltech. In such a conflict, obligations to Caltech take priority. Further details are to be found in Caltech's Conflict of Interest Policy.

### ***Problem Resolution for Work-Related Concerns, not Covered by a Caltech or Administrative Policy or Procedure***

A Postdoctoral Scholar who has a serious, work- or research-related complaint, that is not covered by an existing Institute or Administrative Policy or Procedure (<http://policies.caltech.edu>) should, if possible, first seek informal resolution of the problem through discussion with the faculty sponsor, Division faculty representative for postdoctoral affairs or Division Chair. In addition, Postdoctoral Scholars with serious, work- or research-related concerns may also contact the Director of Employee and Organizational Development in Caltech's Human Resources Department, the Director of Research Compliance, the Vice Provost, or the Scholar and Staff Services Office.

Should the Postdoctoral Scholar wish to pursue a more formal complaint procedure, the Problem Resolution Policy and Process for Campus Staff and Employees at JPL will be followed, with the following modifications: The faculty sponsor fulfills the role of the immediate supervisor, and if the faculty sponsor is not appropriate, the Division Chair should fill this role. The appropriate Vice Provost will fill the role of Human Resources and appeals will be made to the Provost rather than to the Associate Vice President or Director for Human Resources.

### ***Other Resources***

All Postdoctoral Scholars are expected to comply with all of these additional required institutional policies and procedures, as applicable.

The following policies can be found at <https://www.hr.caltech.edu/resources/institute-policies>

- Acceptable use of Electronic Resources
- Compliance with Export Laws and Regulations
- Conflicts of Interest
- Disability and Reasonable Accommodation
- Environment, Health, and Safety
- Nondiscrimination and Equal Employment Opportunity
- Gender-Based Misconduct
- Substance Abuse
- Unlawful Harassment
- Violence Prevention
- Whistleblower Policy

Faculty administrative policies and procedures can be found in Chapter 7 of the Faculty Handbook at [http://provost.caltech.edu/documents/2495/Chapter\\_7.pdf](http://provost.caltech.edu/documents/2495/Chapter_7.pdf)

Other policies can be found at <http://policies.caltech.edu>