

Policy Statement

For

Predocctoral Fellows and Trainees

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Purpose

Graduate education is central to the mission of the University of Pittsburgh and key to this mission is training PhD students to become outstanding scholars and teachers. The purpose of Predocctoral Fellowships (PF) and Traineeships (PT) is to provide a mechanism to support graduate students pursuing their education and professional development. Teaching and/or research will be part of the activities of many Fellows or Trainees, but a Trainee or Fellow’s research will typically be tied to the aims of the fellowship or training grant and so may differ in some respects than if they were supported as a TA, GSA or GSR. Because they are often awarded via a competitive internal or external process, PFs and PTs are considered to be honors as well as sources of financial support.

Definitions

At the University of Pittsburgh all **Predocctoral Fellows and Predocctoral trainees** are enrolled graduate students - typically students in research doctorate programs - who are receiving support while pursuing graduate training.

Students are appointed as **Predocctoral Fellows** when their stipend is paid predominantly either: i) via an individual fellowship awarded to the student by an external funder (such as NSF ,NIH (F30 or F31),

American Heart Association, etc) or ii) via an internal fellowship typically awarded following a competition or other selection process (e.g. Andrew Mellon Fellowships, Provost's Predoctoral Fellowships, etc). The activities in which the student engages during the period of support may include both research and/or teaching. During the fellowship period, students may have requirements beyond those described in the guidelines for the student's graduate program. Typically, these requirements will be specified in the students' application for the fellowship or in the fellowship award documentation.

Students are appointed as **Predoctoral Trainees** when their stipend is paid primarily from an institutional training grant (such as an NIH T32, T15 or NSF NRT). Typically, these grants describe a specific training program that the trainees appointed must complete. This training program may be identical to a degree program at Pitt or may have additional requirements.

Appointment Guidelines

Students appointed as PFs or PTs cannot simultaneously be appointed as TAs/TFs/GSAs or GSRs.

PFs and PTs should receive financial support (stipend, tuition and fee waivers and health insurance) at least equivalent to those provided to Graduate Student Researchers (GSR) in the same program. If an internal or external fellowship or traineeship does not provide an equivalent level of support, the student's support must be supplemented to the equivalent level. Schools should develop policies for determining the source of this support. In some cases rather than directly covering the cost of health insurance, a program may elect to increase the stipend of students supported as fellows or trainees by an amount equivalent to the cost of health insurance provided to a GSR.

The appointment letter shall state the conditions of the appointment and that specifies the expectations, stipend, duration of the appointment, and benefits. Templates and examples of appointment letters will be provided on the [graduate studies website](#). A link to this PF/PT policy should be included with the appointment letter.

Reappointment

A typical appointment as PFs or PTs will be made for no more than one year. However, students may be reappointed if the funding source allows. If external funding lapses, reappointment as a PF or PT will not be possible, although programs will seek to provide alternative mechanisms of support.

Appointment Requirements

Although PFs and PTs are not considered University employees, because they are compensated through the University and because very few PhD students will be supported exclusively as PFs and PTs through their time to degree, each student completes a form I-9 at the time of initial appointment to verify that they are either a US citizen or authorized to be employed in this country.

Responsibilities

University, School, Department, Program: The appointment of a student as a predoctoral fellow or trainee does not reduce the responsibility of the program for the education and support of the student.

Student: When appointed as a predoctoral fellow or trainee the student must still make satisfactory academic progress as described in their graduate program guidelines. Students must still complete all program requirements and this appointment does not change their status as it relates to issues such as conflict of interest, intellectual property, research misconduct, harassment etc.

Early Dismissal

Early dismissal refers to the discontinuation of a PF or PT appointment prior to the originally specified end date. Since all PFs and PTs must be enrolled students, early dismissal from the PF or PT appointment occurs automatically if the student withdraws or is dismissed from their program during the term of PF/PT appointment. Dismissal may also occur if the student violates the terms of the fellowship or fails to make academic progress in their degree program.

Dismissal for lack of progress in the degree program or other training program shall be based upon the evaluation process utilized by the academic program for progress.

Early dismissal also may also occur if the student is found to have violated University or School Policy, Procedure, Guideline etc., including but not limited to the Code of Conduct, Academic Integrity Guidelines.

The PF or PT shall be informed in writing by the department chair or training program director of the reasons for dismissal and information about the appeals procedure shall be provided.

Appeals Procedure

The PF or PT may appeal dismissal by the processes described in their school. Within ten business days of a final decision at the school level, students may appeal to the Provost (provost@pitt.edu). The students appeal petition must include a thorough statement and all facts or evidence which support one or more of the following 1. The School violated or failed to follow one or more university, school or department policy, procedure, guideline, etc.; 2. There is no rational connection between the facts and the decision of dismissal; 3. There is new information which was not available or discoverable prior to the dismissal would significantly alter the decision for dismissal.

If an appeal is received, the Provost or Provost's designee will serve as chair of the appeals committee and will appoint to the committee two faculty members and one student from the University Council on Graduate Study or one graduate student from a list recommended by the Graduate and Professional Student Government. The committee members will be appointed to avoid conflict of interest. For example, no one from the involved academic department shall be on the appeals committee. The

committee will endeavor to schedule the appeal proceeding within 21 business days from receipt of the appeal petition.

The Chair will schedule the appeal proceeding. Applicable parties to the appeal proceedings will receive a copy of the appeal petition and procedures and written notification of the time, date, and place of the proceeding. The appeal will be conducted under the procedural guidance of the Chair, who also shall determine the composition of the committee. The Chair, in its discretion, may elect to decide an appeal based on submission of documents from the applicable parties, with or without oral argument. The appeal process does not include testimony from witnesses. If the Chair, in its discretion, decide to allow oral argument, the applicable parties will be given reasonable time to orally present their position. The decision will be made by the majority of the committee. Once a decision is made by the committee, the Chair will notify the applicable parties.