

Research Appointments at Northwestern Research Staff Policy

Research Staff Policy

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Research Staff Appointment

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Research Staff Policy

Research staff appointments are approved by the Office for Research. Appointments are for a fixed term up to three years. The two contingencies are availability of funds and satisfactory performance. Documentation of unsatisfactory performance must be consistent with the Department of Human Resources staff policies. Any termination, layoff, or reduction in salary must be done in accordance with this Research Staff & Visitor Appointments policy and Department of Human Resources staff policies, and must be approved by the school dean or University center director, as well as by the Department of Human Resources. Documentation of lack of funding leading to reduction in effort and/or termination must be consistent with school or center policies and practices.

University policies pertain to research staff appointees, including but not limited to the [Patent and Invention Policy](#), [Policy on Staff Conflict of Interest](#), [Policy for Reviewing Alleged Research Misconduct](#), [Procedures for Reviewing Alleged Research Misconduct](#), [Human Resources Policies and Procedures Manual](#), which includes the policy on *Evaluative Authority over Faculty or Staff*, formerly called *Employment of Relatives* (see Chapter 1, "Employment," p. 10 of the PDF document), and the [Northwestern University Staff Handbook](#).

Patent and Invention Policy

All research staff and visitors are subject to Northwestern University's policies on intellectual property, including the *Patent and Invention Policy*, which gives the University rights in inventions and discoveries made under conditions of employment or from use of University facilities, resources, or support. The policies regarding intellectual property are available at the [Innovation and New Ventures Office](#) web site.

Conflict of Interest

All research staff and visitors are subject to Northwestern University's Conflict of Interest Policy. The staff conflict of interest policy is available via a link from the [Human Resources Policies and Procedures Manual](#) web site (see Chapter 7, "Conduct").

Research Staff Appointment

Categories of Employment Covered by this Policy

Research associates: Typically hold the PhD, MD, or equivalent terminal degree in their discipline; have received equivalent professional recognition; or have demonstrated exceptional artistic abilities. They are primarily involved in laboratory (rather than clinical) research, although they are not principal investigators except with the written approval of the vice president for research. They are not members of the faculty and are ineligible for tenure. Research associates may be appointed for a term of up to three years.

Senior research associates: Work in the conduct of research and, after receiving the doctoral or equivalent terminal degree, have at least ten years of experience as research associates, or equivalent positions, and have demonstrated significant research achievements in the form of publications, patents, or other measures of research accomplishment. They are primarily involved in laboratory (rather than clinical) research, although they are not principal investigators except with the written approval of the vice president for research. They are not members of the faculty and are ineligible for tenure. Senior research associates may be appointed for a term of up to three years.

Clinical research associates: Typically hold an advanced qualification, including RN or MS or MA. They are primarily involved in administration of clinical trials and should have experience and expertise in running such trials. Individuals holding MD or PhD degrees who are involved in clinical research may also be appointed as clinical research associates. They do not serve as principal investigators on research projects, except with the written approval of the vice president for research. They are not members of the faculty and are ineligible for tenure. Clinical research associates may be appointed for a term of up to three years.

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Senior clinical research associates: Participate in the conduct of clinical research and have at least ten years of experience as clinical research associates, or equivalent positions. They typically hold an advanced qualification, including RN or MS or MA, or are individuals holding MD or PhD degrees who are involved in clinical research, and have demonstrated significant research achievements in the form of publications, patents, or other measures of research accomplishment. They are primarily involved in clinical research, although they are not principal investigators in the conduct of research, except with the written approval of the vice president for research. They are not members of the faculty and are ineligible for tenure. Senior clinical research associates may be appointed for a term of up to three years.

Post-baccalaureate research fellows Individuals with recently granted baccalaureate or master degrees. Under the direction of a faculty supervisor, the post-baccalaureate fellow supports the research efforts of the research laboratory or group. Depending on the scientific discipline and phase of research, they may design, prepare and run experiments; review scientific literature; prepare reports and presentations; develop and present theories and hypotheses; design and build experimental apparatus; operate research equipment; prepare samples for testing and perform a variety of research related activities in support of the research project. The individual's degree must be in a related discipline of the supporting research laboratory or group. No more than six months may have transpired between the date of graduation and the position start date. In general, post-baccalaureate fellows may not be appointed for less than nine months or more than twelve. Exceptions to these appointment term limits may be made for individuals with documented job offers and/or acceptance to graduate school.

Research Specialists: The Research Specialists support the research efforts of the university, research laboratory or group. Depending on the scientific discipline and phase of research, may design, prepare and run experiments; review scientific literature; prepare reports and presentations; develop and present theories and hypotheses; design and build experimental apparatus; operate research equipment; prepare samples for testing and perform a variety of research related activities in support of the research project; however, this role is not eligible to become a Principal Investigator. Master's degree is the minimum educational requirement, with PhD preferred.

Appointment and Funding

Procedure for initial appointment or renewal

The following procedures are used for initial appointments and renewals for covered individuals, except that a curriculum vita (CV) is not required for reappointment in a position at the same level. As appointments expire, faculty sponsors initiate recommendations for renewals on a case-by-case basis.

Good faith search

An effort in good faith to employ persons in EEO classes underrepresented in the research activity is expected on the part of the unit seeking the appointment.

Non-citizens

If the appointee is not a U.S. citizen or permanent resident, a copy of the approved appointment form must be sent to the [International Office](#) by the initiating department or center. The International Office can provide assistance in obtaining the visa that is necessary for employing a foreign national or to extend an offer to visit.

Appointments initiated in departments or school centers

A regular faculty member recommends a research staff appointment to the department chairperson, who forwards the recommendation to the dean. Alternatively, the faculty member makes the recommendation for an appointment in a school center to the center director, who forwards the recommendation to the dean. The procedures for processing research appointments established by the center and school are to be followed.

The [Recommendation for Research Staff Appointment](#) form (must be signed by at least the faculty member sponsoring the request, department chairperson or school-based center director, and dean, to indicate agreement with salary and other terms of the appointment. The form is also signed by the head of any other department or center from which funding is expected for the appointment. The original of the appropriately signed appointment form and a CV are sent to the [Office for Research](#) for approval.

Appointments initiated in University centers

The faculty member sponsoring the request originates and signs the *Recommendation for Research Staff Appointment* form and sends it to the center director for signature of approval. If funding is expected for the appointment from any school, the center director forwards the recommendation to the dean for endorsement. These signatures indicate agreement with the salary and other terms of the appointment. The original of the appropriately signed appointment form and a CV are sent to the [Office for Research](#) for approval.

University centers appointing postdoctoral fellows must send the completed Postdoctoral Fellow Appointment Form, with a copy of the CV and confirmation of degree attainment, to the Office for Research Planning, Finance and Communications for approval.

Offer and letter of appointment

No oral or written offer of employment may be extended until all required approvals have been received, and no payroll action initiating a salary for the appointee can be taken until all conditions in the appointment process have been satisfied.

The [Office for Research](#) sends a copy of the approved *Recommendation for Research Staff Appointment* form to the school dean or the University center director; the original is sent directly to the Department of Human Resources.

Upon receipt of the approved appointment, the dean or center director sends the official letter of appointment to the appointee. Depending on individual school or center procedures, the department, the dean, or the center director initiates an *Appointment and Position Data* form to be sent to the Department of Human Resources (HR). This form may be found at the [Human Resources web site](#).

The letter of appointment must stipulate the term of the appointment and state that the position is dependent on the availability of funds and satisfactory performance.

Appointments and renewals are made for periods varying in length, but not to exceed three years in duration for research associates, senior research associates, clinical research associates and senior clinical research associates.

The appointment letter must specify the conditions of employment, including job responsibilities, appointment duration, and salary. The letter must also specify that University policies pertain to research staff appointees, including but not limited to the [Patent and Invention Policy](#), [Policy on Staff Conflict of Interest](#), [Policy for Reviewing Alleged Misconduct](#), [Procedures for Reviewing Alleged Misconduct](#), [Human Resources Policies and Procedures Manual](#), that includes the policy on *Evaluative Authority over Faculty or Staff, formerly called Employment of Relatives* (see Chapter 1, "Employment," p. 10 of the PDF document), and the [Northwestern University Staff Handbook](#).

Appointment start date and first day of work

Northwestern employees holding research appointments must not be permitted to start working at Northwestern until the appointment has been finalized and an official start date has been determined; this official start date must be later than the approval date of the appointment. In addition, because benefits enrollment must be completed within 31 days of the date of hire or of a qualifying change in family or employment status, an appointee starting work 31 or more days prior to the completion of the appointment process is ineligible for some employee benefits, at least until the next scheduled open enrollment period. Newly hired research staff should attend the orientation session offered by the [Department of Human Resources](#) on or immediately following the first day of work to learn about benefit choices; new employees may also enroll in benefit plans at the orientation session.

Change in start date

On occasion, a start date may be delayed due to visa issues or other circumstances. In instances where a start date is delayed by more than one month, a revised appointment form, with appropriate signature, must be forwarded to the [Office for Research](#) for re-approval.

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Funding for research staff appointments

The appointment is contingent on the availability of funding at an approved rate and cannot extend beyond the period of availability of supporting funds. The prevailing benefit rate is charged to the account that is the source of salary funds. The individual's contribution to benefits will be based on the full-time or part-time status indicated by the effort level; status at less than half time results in ineligibility for some benefits. If the position cannot be supported at the approved level because of insufficient funds, the appointment must either be terminated or the effort must be reduced to a level consistent with the salary that can be paid. Any commitment of salary support in the case of premature termination of project funds will be the responsibility of the department or center. See also the [Policy on Fiscal Responsibility for Sponsored Projects](#).

Salary, Benefits and Taxes

Salary

The salary of a member of the research staff is approved by the dean or center director and The [Office for Research](#) upon the recommendation of the faculty member who is accountable for the terms of the appointment. Salary levels are to meet reasonable standards for professional employment in the applicable discipline.

The minimum salary for full-time research associates, senior research associates, clinical research associates, and senior clinical research associates is \$47,476 per annum.

Research Associates/Senior Research Associates, Clinical Research Associates/Senior Clinical Research Associates

FLSA Classification and minimum pay requirement:

Exempt, full time, requires a minimum annual salary of \$47,476, or

Exempt, part time, requires a minimum weekly salary of \$913.

Post-Baccalaureate Research Fellows, Research Specialist

FLSA Classification and minimum pay requirement:

Non-exempt, full or part time, paid on an hourly basis must earn at least the local minimum wage, eligible for overtime

The [Department of Human Resources](#) can provide additional guidance on FLSA requirements and its application.

Apart from persons in specified categories, persons may not render uncompensated service to Northwestern University unless special arrangements have been approved.

Benefits

Benefits for paid research appointees are managed by the Benefits Division in the Department of Human Resources.

Paid research associates, senior research associates, clinical research associates and senior clinical research associates who meet the FLSA exemption minimum (excluding NRSA Postdoctoral Fellows) are eligible for regular exempt staff benefits, including the health care plan, retirement, paid time absence, and tuition plan benefits, as described in the Summary Plan Descriptions for the respective benefit plans. Any research appointees who are paid hourly are eligible for the same suite of benefits under the regular non-exempt staff benefit plan. The prevailing employee benefit rate is charged to the sponsored account that is the source of salary funds.

The principal investigator is responsible for the administration of paid time benefits, including sick leave, vacation, and personal floating holidays since these obligations are charged to the sponsored account and must be covered by it. Vacation and holidays earned by work on a grant must be paid for by the grant and taken before the grant ends. Extended Sick Leave (EST) may be eligible for reimbursement to the source of funding from the central HR Extended Sick pool, as managed by the Department of Human Resources/Benefits, and the Hartford.

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Applicable policies on leaves and other absence from work are found in the [Human Resources Policies and Procedures Manual](#), (see Chapter 4, "Absence from Work"). For further information contact the Benefits Division of the Department of Human Resources at 847/491-7513 or via e-mail to benefits@northwestern.edu.

Taxes

Generally, compensation received for services is subject to withholding of federal income tax and social security (FICA) tax. Some federal grants provide exemption from withholding income or FICA taxes. Claims for these exemptions should be presented to the Payroll Division of the [Department of Human Resources](#).

Review of Performance

The Department of Human Resources policies regarding performance management and policy violations in Chapter 7, "Conduct," in the [Human Resources Policies and Procedures Manual](#) are applicable to research staff employees, as are the policies and procedures pertaining to performance evaluation for exempt employees. (All applicable policies may also be found in the [Northwestern University Staff Handbook](#).) The [Office for Research](#) and [Department of Human Resources](#) must be notified if an individual's appointment is terminated prior to its end date due to unsatisfactory performance, or if the individual's appointment is not renewed for any reason other than the interruption of grant funding.

Annual salary review

Salary reviews should be conducted annually. This may occur either at the same time as annual staff salary reviews to become effective on September 1 of each year, or at a time to become effective on the anniversary of the appointment.

Policy revised May 2017