

HMS/HSDM Postdoctoral Research Fellow Mentorship Guidelines

The appointment of a Postdoctoral Research Fellow (postdoc, fellow, or trainee) initiates a temporary and defined period of advanced mentored training. A postdoc is expected to engage in independent research while also developing skills and experiences that support their specific career goals and professional development.

Mentorship - These mentorship guidelines are designed to link research goals with career development and progress toward independence. They are meant to foster an ongoing and recurring discussion that involves evaluation, goal setting, and feedback, with input from both postdoc and faculty mentor. From the very start of the postdoc appointment, we encourage individual development planning (IDP) discussions between fellows and their faculty mentors (*see attached IDP Guidelines*). The core mentor responsibility is to oversee and guide their trainee's scientific and career progress. When taking on a postdoc, an advisor accepts responsibility for this unique role with respect to their trainee's scientific development. Mentors and trainees are expected to meet regularly, at a frequency that is appropriate for this stage of training. This is a joint effort between the faculty mentors and the postdocs themselves, who share responsibility for creating an atmosphere that supports the many dimensions of their success.

Expectations - Every lab will have its own norms and work expectations for trainees. At minimum, postdocs must dedicate the time and effort required to make continued progress on their research while actively contributing to the lab through mutual sharing, mentoring, preparation, and sincere effort. It is expected that trainees will gain the knowledge and experience necessary to advance their career through publications, independent investigation, and development of their network. If a faculty mentor believes there are obstacles preventing a fellow from making this commitment, they should discuss it with the postdoc and/or refer them to appropriate resources for advice. While it may be necessary to be in the lab at any given time, day or night, postdocs may not be expected to work 7 days a week for long periods and should be allowed time for vacations and other breaks from lab work. Since hours are not recorded, postdocs should work with their faculty mentor to manage their time, experimental schedule, professional development, and research progress. If at all possible, required activities such as lab meetings should be held during regular business hours to accommodate trainees with family obligations.

Support - The role of the faculty mentor is critically important for a postdoc's training experience. The mentoring relationship is an alliance built on bi-directional respect, open-mindedness, frequent communication, and a willingness to adapt as needed. To that end, below are several guiding questions for the early and ongoing training discussions. Both parties are encouraged to return to these as progress is made, especially during the annual IDP meetings.

How will the postdoc meet their research expectations?

- Does the fellow have regularly scheduled meetings with their faculty mentor(s)?
- Are the project responsibilities clearly understood and is success in these responsibilities defined?
- Are there perceived skill or experience gaps that should be addressed for their core research roles?
- Will the postdoc be supported to learn necessary skills while accomplishing their work?

How will the postdoc be supported in their research, career exploration, and professional development?

- Does the fellow have annual IDP meetings with their faculty mentor(s)?
- Has the fellow identified other relevant mentors with whom they should be meeting?
- What are the avenues to discuss and explore desired career trajectories?
- Is the postdoc encouraged to seek relevant training experiences throughout their term?

Professionalism - HMS and HSDM expect that faculty mentors will always treat their trainees professionally and respect their individuality, which includes recognizing that the postdoc's goals and professional values may differ from their own. Faculty mentors should value and consider their mentee's opinions while delivering feedback in a respectful and constructive manner. At the same time, postdocs are also expected to be open to feedback and respectful of the mentor's time and opinions. Furthermore, both the faculty mentor and trainee are responsible for the continuation of the fellow's training in the rigorous ethical conduct of science.