

# **University of South Alabama**

## **Office of Postdoctoral Education**

**Handbook**

**2021 – 2022**

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## **Welcome to the USA Office of Postdoctoral Education**

The University of South Alabama (“USA”) is dedicated to making a difference in the global and local communities through discovery, health and learning. Postdoctoral research is considered essential to achieving that goal and to advancing the scholarly mission of research. Here at USA, our postdoctoral fellows are training and performing research in a variety of disciplines, including cancer/medical research, computing, engineering, marine sciences, pulmonary medicine, pharmacology, psychology, microbiology, chemistry, and biochemistry.

The USA Office of Postdoctoral Education (OPE) was established and announced at the March 12, 2014 Board of Trustees’ meeting. The purpose of the OPE is to provide services and support to all Postdoctoral Fellows throughout the University. The OPE works closely with all academic units and disciplines to address the needs and concerns of postdoctoral fellows.

Postdoctoral Fellows broaden and enhance the University’s research capacity by bringing more talent to the campus. We believe that postdoctoral training should also provide the individual fellows with mentored advanced training to enhance their professional skills and research independence needed to pursue their chosen career path.

Physical Address:

USA Office of Postdoctoral Education  
307 North University Blvd., AD301  
Mobile, AL 36688

## An Overview of the Postdoctoral Experience at USA

All postdoctoral researchers are expected to increase their expertise in a specialist subject, usually in a mentored research and/or scholarly training for the purpose of acquiring professional skills needed to pursue their chosen career path. The OPE believes that postdoctoral students will broaden and enhance the University's research capacity. Additionally, postdoctoral research will help USA achieve its mission of making a difference in the global and local communities through discovery, health and learning.

The purpose of the OPE is to enrich the postdoctoral experience through services and support to both the fellows and the departments. However, the ultimate responsibility for the success of a postdoctoral appointment rests with the Mentors. Faculty Mentors will assist the postdoctoral fellow in developing a research project which will enhance the fellow's knowledge and technical skills, encourage the fellow to present their work and to publish results in a timely fashion, meet regularly with the fellow to discuss research progress and provide regular feedback regarding performance. In addition, Mentors will ensure that the fellow is aware of University policies regarding responsible conduct of research and compliance issues, and other relevant topics.

At the University of South Alabama ("USA"), the postdoctoral research experience emphasizes scholarship and continued research training for individuals who have recently completed a doctoral degree. This policy defines terms and conditions related to postdoctoral appointments at USA. Additionally, postdoctoral appointments are subject to all other applicable USA policies and procedures. The USA Office of Postdoctoral Education is responsible for facilitating

## **Qualifications**

Appl

Visas

## Postdoctoral Orientation

All postdoctoral fellows will be required to attend an orientation by the Office of Postdoctoral Education to review their benefits and sign required paperwork. The orientation will provide information concerning:

- x postdoctoral services and support available;
- x benefits overview;
- x an introduction to the university campus;
- x local contact information for getting settled.

In addition, postdoctoral fellows may be required to also attend an orientation in their individual organizational unit.

## Compensation and benefits

Minimum compensation levels for Postdoctoral Fellows are commensurate with the postdoctoral entry level (PGY 0) stipends set by the National Institutes of Health at the time of appointment (see current NRSA stipend notice at: <http://grants1.nih.gov/training/nrsa.htm>). Higher compensation levels are available in some situations.

- When a Postdoctoral Fellow successfully obtains extramural support via a training grant, fellowship funding or NIH supplement, the Fellow will receive the award amount specified by the funding agency if it exceeds the minimum compensation level set by the University.
- If compensation provided by an extramural award is less than the University minimum, the difference will be supplied to the Fellow by the Mentor or another source in the University if funds are available (note that, typically, federal research funds cannot be used to supplement NIH training/fellowship stipends).
- Compensation may be incremented annually, if funds are available from the Mentor, another funding source in the University, or extramural awards.

## Taxes and Withholding

Depending upon the source of funding for Postdoctoral Fellows, compensation may be subject to federal and state income taxes and FICA taxes. Postdoctoral Fellows whose support derives from Mentor's grants and/or internal funds will have taxes withheld and a Form W-2 filed with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). Postdoctoral Fellows who receive compensation via an extramural training grant or fellowship, where the agency policy identifies that funding as a stipend, will not have taxes withheld. If a Postdoctoral Fellow has funding from both extramural training award and internal funds, the primary funding source will be used to determine withholding and reporting requirements. Regardless, compensation is considered income and may be taxable. Fellows are encouraged to consult the IRS or a tax professional to understand the implications of their compensation status.

## Benefits

- x USA Health & Dental Plan Insurance – Postdoctoral Fellows are required to have health insurance. The USA Health & Dental Plan provides comprehensive health and dental benefits received within a network of Blue Cross Blue Shield providers. Within the USA Health & Dental Plan is a network of hospitals, physicians, outpatient clinics and other providers affiliated with the University of South Alabama. Their participation in the USA Health & Dental Plan allows members to receive medical care at a lower cost to both the Plan and the member. The cost of the USA Health & Dental Plan Insurance is shared by you and the University.
- x Premium Conversion – USA Health & Dental Plan premiums are automatically deducted before any federal, state, or Social Security taxes are withheld. The result is a reduction of taxable income equal to the amount paid for health and dental insurance during the calendar year. Enrollment in Premium Conversion is automatic.
- x Flexible Spending Accounts (SouthFlex) – Postdoctoral Fellows can take advantage of flexible spending accounts which are administered by Blue Cross Blue Shield of Alabama. Participants can set aside pre-tax money through payroll deductions to pay for qualified health care expenses, including deductibles, copays, out-of-pocket dental expenses and qualified child care expenses. Money set aside in these accounts will reduce taxable income, providing participants with more value for the dollar. Each plan provides a VISA® reimbursement account card for use when you incur a qualified medical expense. Participants may also submit expenses through the online participant portal for reimbursement. As other eligible expenses are incurred such as dependent care expenses, claims may be filed for reimbursement. The University pays all administrative expenses for this benefit.
- x Group Life Insurance – Group Term Life and Accidental Death and Dismemberment insurance benefits are included in the Basic Group Life Insurance Plan. The amount of life insurance for which Postdoctoral Fellows are eligible is determined by base pay. These benefits are provided at no cost to the Postdoctoral Fellow. In addition, the spouse and eligible dependents are each provided with \$5,000 of term life insurance at no cost to the Postdoctoral Fellow.
- x Additional Life Insurance – Postdoctoral Fellows may purchase, at their own expense, additional term life in an amount equal to 1, 2, or 3 times the amount provided under the Basic Plan.
- x Group Long Term Disability Insurance – The University provides, at no cost to the Postdoctoral Fellow, a Basic Long-Term Disability Plan which provides a 60% income replace benefit in the event of a qualifying disability. Once approved, benefits are payable from the 91st day of disability.
- x Travel Insurance - This University paid benefit provides the Postdoctoral Fellow and their eligible dependents with medical, travel, legal and financial assistance services when faced with an emergency while traveling more than 100 miles away from home.

- x University of South Alabama 403(b) Plan and 457(b) Deferred Compensation Plan – Postdoctoral Fellows have the option of participating in supplemental retirement plans through TIAA-CREF which allow investments in fixed and variable annuities and mutual

### On-the-job Injury Benefits (Employee Handbook 4.1.10)

The University of South Alabama strives to protect its employees from undue financial hardship resulting from qualified job-related injuries or disabilities. In order for the University to assess requests for on-the-job injury (OJI) benefits, the procedures described below must be followed:

If you sustain a serious injury at the worksite during work hours, arrangements will be made for you to be treated at the USA Medical Center Emergency Room. If time is of the essence, based on the severity of the injury, the employee may be taken to the nearest emergency department. If you sustain an injury that is not serious enough to warrant emergency room treatment, and you wish to be considered for OJI benefits by the University, you must report to the hospital health nurse, the house supervisor (after normal business hours), USA Family Practice Center or USA Physicians Group, for treatment.

As a full-time employee, you may receive up to 24 hours paid administrative leave for accidents occurring at the worksite during work hours without affecting your sick leave, vacation or PTO accrual. Part-time employees will be paid administrative leave days at the regular rate of pay for the percentage of eight hours that they normally work.

An Accident/Incident Report must be completed by your supervisor within 72 hours of the worksite accident in order to be considered for OJI benefits. For this reason, a worksite accident should be reported immediately to your supervisor.

If you are covered under the University's group health insurance program, your medical expenses due to a qualified OJI will be covered up to the limits of the health plan. If you are not covered under the University's group plan, please contact your supervisor or Human

All benefits paid by the University (reinstatement of vacation, sick leave, PTO or temporary wage replacement payments at 66 2/3% of base salary) will cease no later than 90 days following the date of injury. If your attending physician anticipates a disability of more than 90 calendar days, the waiting period for long-term disability (LTD) benefits, you must make application for LTD benefits based upon such prognosis.

The University will require relevant medical records of injured or disabled parties and may require additional examinations and tests as deemed necessary.

### Research Records and Intellectual Property

Research records, including original notebooks, computerized files and tangible research materials, created by postdoctoral fellows during their appointment are the property of the University of South Alabama, and as such are retained by the University in departure of the individual. Subject to approval of the Mentor, copies of the records may be made and taken by the fellow. Fellows should be familiar with and adhere to the University policy on intellectual property (<https://www.southalabama.edu/departments/research/policies.html#intellectual-property>).

### Obligations of Postdoctoral Fellows

During this period of research training, Postdoctoral Fellows are obligated to conscientiously perform research and scholarly work, maintain adequate research records, and conform to standards for responsible conduct of research set out by the University. Postdoctoral Fellows are responsible for the conduct of their research and for the accuracy of their research records.

## Annual Evaluations

Mentors will provide Postdoctoral Fellows with a written evaluation of progress and performance

For other issues that cannot be resolved informally (see below), Postdoctoral Fellows should pursue relevant University grievance procedures.

Research Misconduct: Allegations of research misconduct should be pursued through the USA Office of Research Compliance and Assurance. Policies and information regarding the Whistleblower Hotline are available at <http://www.southalabama.edu/researchcompliance/standards.html> or by dialing 1-844-666-3599.

Title IX Issues: To address/report workplace issues of sexual harassment/violence or sexual discrimination, Postdoctoral Fellows should contact the Faculty Title IX coordinator:

Paula Buerger, Manager EEO

TRP Building III Suite 2200

(251) 460-6641

[pbuerger@southalabama.edu](mailto:pbuerger@southalabama.edu)<https://secure.ethicspoint.com/domain/media/en/gui/60474/>

Other Workplace Issues: To address/report other workplace issues of harassment or discrimination which are not of a sexual nature, Postdoctoral Fellows should contact USA Human Resources. While the Postdoctoral Fellow may choose to consult a lawyer regarding grievance/conflict and a lawyer may be present to hear testimony and observe, lawyers will not be allowed to otherwise participate in either the informal process or the formal process of the University.

Postdoctoral Fellows Association

USA Postdoctoral Fellows may consider joining the National Postdoctoral Association (<http://www.nationalpostdoc.org/>). The association provides career development, programmatic support, research collaboration, and social opportunities for Fellows.

Responsible Conduct of Research Training

All federal funding agencies require that postdoctoral fellows receive training in Responsible Conduct of Research. The National Institutes of Health further require face-to-face training in this area. If this type of training is not otherwise available, postdoctoral fellows will be required to sign up for a course on Responsible Conduct of Research (GIS-501), offered during the fall semester every Tuesday from 3:30 to 5:00 PM.

## Getting Started Locally

There are many resources available to new postdoctoral fellows at the University of South Alabama to help with the transition into a new community and research environment. These resources include the mentor, fellow lab members, departmental administrators, International Student Services, and the Office of Postdoctoral Education. All of these resources are here to



