7.4.1 Postdoctoral Scholar Support: Policy

Last updated on:

Summary
Postdoctoral scholars at Stanford may not be self-supporting. Minimum levels of compensation are established annually by Stanford University, provided in the form of stipends or salary (or a combination of both).

Rationale
At Stanford University, postdoctoral scholars are appointed and registered as advanced nonmatriculated graduate students. While they are appointed as trainees, postdoctoral scholars are also important contributors to the research activities of the programs in which they are appointed. They must be appointed on a full-time basis and supported financially at or above the minimum level established by the university [1].

Policy
Postdoctoral scholars at Stanford must be supported either by Stanford grants and contracts, training grants, departmental or School fellowship funds, external fellowships, or by a combination of these sources. Postdoctoral scholars may not be self-supporting. Appointments for less than 100% time need to be pre-approved by the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs.

All postdoctoral scholars, regardless of their source of funding, must be paid at least the minimum level based on years and months of experience [1] established annually by the University Provost. A school, department or program may establish a higher minimum salary level for postdoctoral scholars paid within that school, department or program.

All financial support for postdoctoral scholars, whether provided as salary or stipend (or both), must be entered in Stanford’s Graduate Financial Support (GFS) System and approved in the Workflow application.

Authority:
- Provost (Policy)
- Office of Postdoctoral Affairs [2] (Implementation)

Applicability:
All postdoctoral scholars and programs.
1. Salary Support

Payments for work performed on Stanford research contracts and grants will be processed in the form of assistantship appointments. Unlike graduate student assistantships, assistantship appointments for postdoctoral scholars are not limited by the university's academic calendar, and may start and stop on any dates as established by the hiring department. Salary payments are entered as assistantship paylines in GFS, approved in Workflow and processed through the University Payroll Office where appropriate taxes will be withheld. Postdoctoral scholars being paid in this way have an employer-employee relationship with Stanford University. A negotiated fringe benefit rate will be applied to postdoctoral scholar salary payments.

2. Stipend Support

A postdoctoral fellowship is a competitive award of financial support to an individual postdoctoral scholar, providing a stipend and, in some cases, Stanford registration fees, benefits or other expenses. Although postdoctoral fellowships may be awarded on the basis of a proposed research program, they are not awarded to accomplish a specific statement of work, and they do not lead to an employer-employee relationship. Postdoctoral fellowships are awarded on a merit basis to assist a scholar in his or her professional training and development.

Stipend support may also be provided from department funds, gift accounts, and school fellowships where available, as well as from Training Grants and other external sources, where the financial assistance is not being provided as salary for work performed.

Postdoctoral fellowships may not be awarded to international scholars on an H-1B (employment) visa. Scholars on an H-1B visa may apply for fellowship support, but, if awarded, they will not be able to accept the funding without changing their visa, normally to J-1 status.

Individual postdoctoral fellowships may specify other restrictions related to eligibility.

3. Registration Fees

Each academic quarter, Postdoctoral registration fees are paid on behalf of the scholar. These fees may be charged directly to a grant or contract paying the scholar, or to a fellowship or Training Grant supporting the scholar. Where
neither of these funding sources is available, the fee will be paid by the faculty mentor or the department in which the scholar is appointed.

The cost of postdoctoral registration fees must be paid for the scholar for each academic quarter in which the individual holds an appointment. This fee will be paid as a tuition allowance (TAL) for postdoctoral scholars being paid salary. For those fully funded on fellowship or Training Grant support, the registration fee will either be paid by the source of fellowship or training support, or by the faculty mentor or department appointing the scholar.

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4. Tax Status

All salary and stipend support is subject to taxation. The amount of tax varies according to total income, dependency status, treaty status for international students, and individual circumstances.

Salary payments are subject to tax withholdings.

Fellowship and traineeship stipends paid to U.S. citizens and permanent residents are not subject to withholding but are considered taxable income and must be reported.

International scholars are subject to U.S. federal tax laws and California State tax laws. Qualifying residents of countries which have tax treaties with the U.S. may be exempt from tax withholding or receive other benefits.

The payment of the Stanford registration fee on behalf of the Postdoctoral Scholar is not subject to tax.

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5. Benefits

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All financial support for postdoctoral scholars, whether provided as salary or stipend (or both), must be entered in Stanford’s Graduate Financial Support (GFS) System and approved in the Workflow application.

Postdoctoral scholars are entitled to the benefits described in Research Policy Handbook, Postdoctoral Scholars [4], and on the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs web site [5].

For scholars whose compensation consists of at least 50% FTE salary, the cost of benefits is paid from the benefits pool funded by the application of the fringe benefit rate. If a scholar is receiving salary for less than 50% FTE (for example, if most of the support is in the form of fellowship stipends, with supplemental salary), the salary will be charged the "contingent" fringe benefit rate.

Benefits for postdoctoral scholars supported on fellowships and Training Grants, and for those receiving less than 50% FTE salary, are normally funded by the source of the fellowship or training support. If that funding source does not permit the use of its funds to pay for the scholar’s benefits, the faculty mentor or the appointing department will be required to fund the scholar's benefits from their own appropriate sources.

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6. Terminating a Postdoctoral Scholar Appointment

The Office of Postdoctoral Affairs must be notified in advance of any change in status of a postdoctoral scholar, including the termination of an appointment. The department is responsible for ending all pay lines associated with the scholar at the appropriate time. The termination of financial support does NOT happen automatically when the postdoctoral career is ended in Stanford’s Student Administration records.

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Related Content:
Related Policies
- GAP 5.10, Converting to Postdoctoral Status [6]
- GAP 5.11, Postdoctoral Scholars in Degree Programs [7]
- Postdoctoral Scholars [4], Research Policy Handbook

Related Bulletin Sections
- Postdoctoral Scholars [8]

Related Information and Forms
- GFS Policy Manual [9]
- Paying Postdoctoral Scholars [10]
- Minimum Postdoctoral Compensation Levels [1]