

Postdoc Mentoring Committee Guidelines*

Department of Neurobiology

Preamble:

The onus/responsibility for a successful postdoctoral experience and advancement of the postdoc to their next desired career level lies primarily on the joint activities of the postdoc and their faculty advisor. Postdocs often lack formal mechanisms of support and mentorship available to graduate students or even faculty. As such, a postdoc mentoring committee (PDMC) can play a vital role in helping postdoctoral fellows be successful and integrate into the community. The sole purpose of the PDMC is to support the postdoc and to help them successfully navigate their career advancement.

Each PDMC ideally consists of at least three faculty members, in addition to the postdoc's PI, chosen by the postdoc in consultation with their advisor. PDMCs should be established for all new postdocs recruited to the department within the first year of postdoc arrival. PDMCs will provide valuable advice and guidance throughout a fellow's time in the department and help them to advance toward their career goals.

The following questions define PDMCs and their roles:

When should the PDMC be formed and first meet? The faculty advisor should discuss the need for the PDMC with the postdoc before they arrive so that they can think about its composition. The postdoc and their supervisor will work together to establish the committee (3 members), and invite the members. The Neurobiology Postdoc Group (NPG) will assist in introducing and suggesting committee members. The postdoc will complete the PDMC acceptance form, obtain signatures from the committee members agreeing to serve, and submit this to the department via email (currently Emily Harris, emily.harris@neuro.utah.edu) to be stored as a record of committee membership. The first meeting should ideally occur within 6 months of the postdoc's arrival.

What is the goal of the first PDMC meeting? The goal of this meeting is to get acquainted with the postdoc's career goals, discuss the Individual Development Plan (IDP) that the postdoc made with their primary mentor (see the IDP Resources and Templates folder for additional instructions and examples), answer any questions the postdoc may have about the benefits of forming a PDMC, and convey the contents of this document.

How should the PDMC meetings be conducted? The postdoc should meet with their PDMC individually or as a group once per year. The postdoc is responsible for scheduling PDMC meetings.

At the end of each PDMC meeting, the postdoc and committee should agree on an action list that the postdoc should work on in the coming year. These action items should be documented at the meeting using the PDMC meeting report form and signed by the committee members. The postdoc is primarily responsible for ensuring that meeting reports are completed. Previous year's action items should be shared with the committee before the next PDMC meeting.

What are the responsibilities of the postdoc? The primary responsibility of the mentored postdoc is to take ownership of their career development and success as a trainee and to use the PDMC as a resource to enhance their career development. The postdoc should feel comfortable

* Adapted from "Chair's Guidelines for Junior Faculty Members and their Mentoring Committees," by Dr. Michael R. Culbertson, Chair, Laboratory of Genetics, University of Wisconsin, Madison.

requesting professional and scientific advice from the PDMC, the Department Chair, and other colleagues whenever needed. Finally, the postdoc is responsible for keeping track of their activities and updating their CVs.

What are the responsibilities of PDMC members? The primary responsibility of the PDMC is to be readily accessible to the postdoc and provide scientific and professional advice in a timely manner. Typical roles of committee members are to read and offer advice on grant proposals, to discuss proposal strategies (how many proposals to write, research directions, and strategies for applying for career development and fellowship awards), etc.

- Provide feedback and advice that will give complementary and alternative points of view in addition to the postdoc's primary faculty advisor in the following areas:
 - Research in progress (RIP) updates
 - Seminars and talks
 - Job documents and chalk talks
 - When and how to apply for independent faculty or industry positions
- Inform postdocs about training and funding resources inside and outside of the University of Utah, such as:
 - NIH/NSF and other government-sponsored fellowship awards
 - T32 fellowships
 - Foundational fellowships
 - Opportunities for international postdocs
 - Academic courses and professional development training.
- Help the postdoc develop a mentoring plan:
 - Setting research, training, fellowship applications, and manuscript preparation timelines.
 - Review the postdoc's annual update of their Individual Development Plan.
- Facilitate networking for career development
- Provide letters of recommendation or support in job applications for postdoc
- Be available for counsel, which may be independent of the faculty advisor, to provide perspective on interpersonal conflicts.

How should the PDMCs be monitored? The postdoc is responsible for initiating, monitoring, and maintaining their PDMC. However, the department (currently Emily Harris, emily.harris@neuro.utah.edu) will send a yearly email reminder to schedule an annual PDMC meeting after receiving the PDMC committee acceptance form from the postdoc. She can also assist in scheduling the meeting date, time, and room based on the schedules of the PDMC members. However, the meeting will not be scheduled automatically, and the postdoc must take the initiative to lead and maintain their PDMC activity.

Can changes be made to the PDMC membership? Science and career trajectory may naturally evolve; the postdoc and committee can reformulate the committee's membership or choose a new chair to ensure that the PDMC best meets the needs of the postdoc member.

Postamble:

The function of the PDMCs is to provide a formal structure of mentorship in addition to the postdoc's primary faculty advisor. PDMCs will help postdocs be successful in their careers, guiding them as they strive to achieve excellence in scholarship, education, administration/community service, and career advancement. Furthermore, PDMCs help create a thriving and supportive postdoctoral community in the department and the University of Utah.

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