

UCSF Office Postdoc

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[Home](#) > [Faculty Mentors](#) > Guidelines for Mentoring Postdocs

Guidelines for Mentoring Postdocs

The Need for Postdoctoral Scholar Mentoring

- A good mentoring relationship can be crucial to the success of postdoctoral scholars as they develop original research ideas and move toward greater independence and maturity.
- Mentoring the next generation of scientists is a shared professional responsibility of all scientists.
- Successful mentoring is a dynamic process that evolves through a series of stages, whereby each participant learns to respect and trust the other's commitment, expertise, and individuality.
- The focus of mentoring should be on the socialization of the mentee, helping them toward an understanding of the political, ethical, economic, and social dynamics within the academic community.
- Effective mentoring roles will vary and can be those of advocate, advisor, role model, guide, coach, and sounding board.
- Mentees should find multiple mentors and search both inside and outside their department.

Basic Obligations of the Mentor

The Appointment Process

- Contact your HR Postdoc Generalist to obtain a template appointment letter in order to ensure that you include all information required. Experience has shown that vague language and missing information can cause problems after the postdoc arrives on campus.
- Encourage postdocs to attend the [next postdoc orientation session](#) ^[1] held by the Office for Postdoctoral Scholars.
- Provide some sort of welcome activity in the lab; greet and introduce the postdoc to lab members on the first day and ensure that there is a designated workspace arranged.
- Ensure that the postdoc meets with the HR Service Center postdoc administrator to sign all appropriate documents and is informed about health benefits, taking time off, sick leave, etc.

Orientation to the Postdoc Experience, to UCSF, to the Disciplinary Profession, to the Lab, and to the Mentor/Mentee relationship

- Discuss the source of funding for the postdoctoral salary. Is the postdoc expected to obtain an outside fellowship or is s/he to be paid by the PI's research or training grants?
- Explicitly discuss with your postdoc the scientific and educational expectations of the fellowship, training grant, etc. and ask if s/he has questions.
- Explicitly discuss the postdoc's expectations of the mentor/mentee relationship.
- Inform the postdoc of available resources in your lab and at UCSF that could facilitate the start-up period.
- Ideally, these first four items should be discussed and agreed upon by both the postdoc and the potential mentor before either commits to the appointment.
- Alert your postdoc to support from the Office for Postdoctoral Scholars and the [Office of the Ombuds](#) ^[2]. (Contact Dr. Christine D. Des Jarlais, assistant dean for postdocs and career development; 476-1558 or christine.desjarlais@ucsf.edu ^[3]).
- Encourage the postdoc to let you know right away should s/he ever feel treated unfairly or encounter any problems, and carefully follow up on any such concerns.
- Encourage the postdoc to become an active mentor to graduate students.

Building Trust

- A mentoring relationship takes time to build.
- Aim to be a wise and trusted counselor. Mentoring is a mindset, an opportunity to build a relationship through the research project and by doing simple joint activities (e.g., informal conversation over a cup of coffee; attending a lecture together).
- Ask your postdoc about his/her goals and respect and accept those goals.
- Don't try to "overdirect" the postdoc, but be direct and honest if a problem has arisen.
- Encourage feedback from the postdoc regarding his/her need for guidance in particular areas.

- Engage in a conversation when you are not distracted and can focus on the postdoc's concerns. Try arranging a regular meeting time (uninterrupted by phone calls, email, etc.) to share your knowledge, personal experiences, and love for science with the postdoc.
- Especially watch for depression, fatigue, isolation, pessimism, and difficulty concentrating. [Consult the Postdoc Guide to Caring](#) ^[4] or refer postdoc to the [Faculty and Staff Assistance Program](#) ^[5].
- Remember the goal: To help the postdoc gain the appropriate experience in order to advance his/her scientific abilities and to pursue a satisfying professional career.

Education/Training

- Explicitly instruct the postdoc in rigorous experimental design, careful analysis of data, effective problem-solving strategies, and critical interpretation of the scientific literature.
- Inform the postdoc of available resources and be willing to refer him/her to someone else for help/information (e.g., materials, equipment and expertise in other labs).
- Discuss a timeline for progress in the research project.
- Encourage the postdoc to seek additional mentors.
- Involve the postdoc in establishing successful collaborations.
- Involve the postdoc in scientific discussions within lab meetings and/or on an individual basis.
- Participate in and encourage participation in talks/seminars/educational activities.
- Provide opportunities for the postdoc to participate in the writing and reviewing of papers and grants.
- Provide constructive feedback on oral and written communication skills (papers, fellowship/grant applications).
- Inform the postdoc of skills and procedures required for successful lab management (e.g., budgeting, recruitment strategies) and encourage participation in related seminars.
- Encourage creativity and independence.
- Strive to be a role model and foster an environment to ensure the postdoc serves as a role model to graduate students.
- Discuss scientific conduct in terms of individual and institutional integrity and ethics in scientific research, including intellectual property of the postdoc. For more information about intellectual property, go to the UCSF [Office of Innovation, Technology & Alliances](#) ^[6].

Evaluation

- The mentor shall conduct periodic reviews with the postdoctoral scholar at least once per year (per Article 9 of the [UC/UAW Postdoc Union Contract](#) ^[7]).
- The postdoctoral scholar will be given a written evaluation upon his/her request (per Article 9 of the UC/UAW Postdoc Union Contract).
- The review will assess the postdoc's progress to date, strengths, areas needing improvement, and potential for a research career in the discipline.
- The review may include a set of activities/expectations for the following year.
- All written evaluations shall be signed by the faculty mentor and the postdoc and kept on file in the appropriate HR Service Center office.

If the mentor anticipates or recognizes a serious problem with the postdoc's work performance or conduct, then the mentor should review "Article 5: Discipline and Dismissal" for proper procedures and contact the Postdoc Office at 476-1558.

- Maintain open communication with the postdoc regarding career goals and options. Include a periodic review of mutual expectations.
- Offer frank and candid assessment of the postdoc's potential to become an independent investigator.
- Ask the postdoc periodically if there is anything you can do to further improve the experience.

Career Preparation

- Since the postdoc appointment is assumed to be a stepping-stone to a career, postdocs and their mentors should discuss career plans and job search strategies.
- Support/encourage the postdoc to present their work at scientific meetings.
- Help the postdoc engage in networking (e.g., introduce him/her to colleagues at meetings or by phone/email).
- Play an active role in the postdoc's job search (e.g., advice on application letters, CVs, interviews, presentations).
- Consider asking the postdoc to be a co-author of invited book chapters/review articles, when time permits.
- Offer opportunities for the postdoc to develop supervisory skills through training students and other research staff.
- Encourage the postdoc to participate in career development seminars and activities sponsored by the UCSF [Office of Career and Professional Development](#) ^[8].
- Encourage the postdoc to actively seek opportunities for professional experience and advancement (e.g., volunteer for committees, help organize scientific meetings/retreats).

Areas Requiring Sensitivity

- Promote inclusiveness.
- Cultural issues (especially pertaining to international postdocs): If the mentor is not familiar with a particular culture, it is of great importance to demonstrate willingness to communicate with and to understand each postdoc as a unique individual.
- Gender issues
- Sexual orientation issues
- Disability issues
- Family responsibilities. Both women and men may face challenging family issues; mentors should be alert to postdocs who need extra support when having a child, raising a child alone, returning to school after child-rearing, caring for an elderly parent, etc.
- For pregnancy leave, parental, and family and medical leave policies, please refer to Article 12, "Leaves of Absence" in the [postdoc contract](#) ^[7].
- Sexual Harassment: Inappropriate closeness between mentors and postdocs will produce personal, ethical, and legal consequences not only for the persons involved but also for the programs or institutions of which they are part. Be guided by common sense. Even consensual relationships between a mentor and postdoc are highly inappropriate. See the [UC policy on sexual harassment](#) ^[9] (revised January 2016).
- Be careful that friendship with a postdoc doesn't turn into favoritism. Resolve to treat postdocs in your lab as equitably as possible.

Benefits to the Mentor

- Personal and professional satisfaction.
- Reputation as a good mentor will attract high quality postdocs.
- Good mentoring facilitates staying on top of your field.

- Being a mentor extends your network.
- Being a mentor extends your contribution to the scientific enterprise.

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Links:

- [1] <https://postdocs.ucsf.edu/orientation>
- [2] <http://ombuds.ucsf.edu/>
- [3] <mailto:christine.desjarlais@ucsf.edu>
- [4] <https://postdocs.ucsf.edu/sites/postdocs.ucsf.edu/files/wysiwyg/Postdoc-Guide-to-Caring-April-2017.pdf>
- [5] <http://ucsfhr.ucsf.edu/index.php/assist/>
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