

# Frequently Asked Questions

## 1. How much leave am I eligible for if I have a new child, or a family or medical emergency?<sup>1</sup>

A Postdoctoral Scholar is eligible for six weeks of paid parental leave to care for a new biological or adopted child. The expectation is that the Postdoctoral Scholar will exhaust all available vacation and sick leave (approx. 4 ½ weeks per year). The PI will then grant a minimum additional 1½ weeks of paid leave. This paid parental leave must be taken within one year of the birth or placement of the child.

- Scholars may be eligible for Family and Medical Leave if they meet the eligibility requirements under the exceptions section of the [eligible employees](#) section of the Family and Medical Leave Policy: <https://hr.unc.edu/benefits/leave-holidays/fmla/>

## 2. Can I take courses at UNC? How do I enroll? What is the cost?

There are two options available for postdocs who would like to take courses here at UNC-Chapel Hill. Both options listed below are on a space available basis. Postdocs are not eligible for the permanent employee tuition waiver, so the cost associated will be an out of pocket expense.

**Auditing Courses:** Another option for postdoctoral scholars, for non-credit, is auditing a class. Postdocs can pay a \$20 fee per class to the University Cashier's Office with permission from the instructor and completion of a drop/add registration form to the Office of the University Registrar. More information can be found on the Office of the University Registrar's website: <https://registrar.unc.edu/guide/registration-policies/auditing-a-course/>

**Part-time Studies (courses for credit):** All postdocs are eligible to take courses through the William and Ida Friday Center for Continuing Education as well as register for courses in the classroom or on-line as a Part-Time students. The full range of graduate and undergraduate courses are open during the day on a space-available basis, and core curriculum of undergraduate courses are offered at night. Admission to UNC-Chapel Hill is required for enrollment into the classroom courses. For graduate-level courses, you will need permission from the professor teaching the course to register for the class. More information on Part-time Classroom Studies can be found on the William and Ida Friday Center for Continuing Education Website (<http://fridaycenter.unc.edu/creditprograms/parttimeclassroomstudies/>). How to Apply for Admission To Part-time Classroom Studies: (<http://fridaycenter.unc.edu/creditprograms/parttimeclassroomstudies/admission/>).

## 3. Does UNC provide any retirement plans to postdocs?

Yes. The UNC System Voluntary 403(b) Retirement Program is a supplemental retirement plan that allows employees to set aside payroll-deducted contributions on a tax-deferred or Roth after-tax basis. Postdocs can set up a 403(b) supplemental retirement plan by contacting the benefits office at 919-962-6255. For more information visit: <https://hr.unc.edu/benefits/plans/retirement/voluntary-403b/>

## 4. What options and resources are available for childcare?

The Office of Human Resources at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill provides information on a number of child care programs and resources designed to help meet the needs of postdocs who have responsibilities for children: <https://hr.unc.edu/benefits/work-life/child-care/>

## 5. Can I defer or reduce my student loan payments? What are my loan deferment or forbearance options?

Postdoctoral scholars may be eligible for deferment of Stafford, Perkins, and similar student loans because they are engaged in a full-time fellowship program at an institution of higher learning. As a postdoc, you may qualify under the condition of continuing your professional training at this institution. Education-related deferment forms may be obtained at the National Student Loan Program site:

<http://www.nslp.org/borrowers/>.

Lending agencies differ in their deferral requirements—your individual agency will make the final determination of eligibility. Regardless of deferment decisions, you are ultimately responsible for timely payment of any unsubsidized loans. Follow the guidelines on the website for [Deferment](http://www.nslp.org/borrowers/resources/managing-student-loans/deferment-forbearance/).  
<http://www.nslp.org/borrowers/resources/managing-student-loans/deferment-forbearance/>

Forbearance may also be an option if you are having difficulty making your federal student loan payment and don't qualify for a deferment, contact your loan holder about a forbearance to delay or lower your monthly payment.

#### 6. How will I be evaluated? How can I prepare for my Annual Performance Evaluation?

At the beginning of an appointment, each Postdoc will prepare an [Individual Development Plan](#) (IDP) that identifies his or her professional needs and career objectives. A written evaluation of each Postdoc's work performance will also be performed on an annual basis (based on appointment year) using the [Annual Evaluation Form](#) or a similar format. The Mentor will complete the evaluation form and discuss it with the Postdoc during a meeting. The Mentor and the Postdoc should review the evaluation together and then both sign the form. For more information please visit the [Postdoctoral Scholar Policy](#) on our website:  
<https://research.unc.edu/files/2017/10/Postdoc-Policy-Aug-2017.pdf>

#### 7. Can I attend sporting events at UNC?

Before planning to attend sporting events at UNC, become familiar with UNC Faculty and Staff Athletic Ticket Policies: [http://www.goheels.com/ViewArticle.dbml?DB\\_LANG=C&SITE=UNC&DB\\_OEM\\_ID=3350&ATCLID=205495131&SPID=1080](http://www.goheels.com/ViewArticle.dbml?DB_LANG=C&SITE=UNC&DB_OEM_ID=3350&ATCLID=205495131&SPID=1080).

UNC employees and postdocs can gain free access for themselves and their immediate families to regular season home games for Men's Soccer, Women's Soccer, and Men's Lacrosse by displaying their UNC One Card or UNC Hospital ID at the gate of the sporting facility, based on availability.

Based on availability, tickets in reserved seating are free for Baseball and Women's Basketball. For Baseball, beginning one and a half hours prior to the start of the game, postdocs can go to the Boshamer Stadium ticket office to pick up a reserved ticket for themselves and their immediate family (limit 4). For Women's Basketball, beginning one hour prior to the start of the game, postdocs can go to the Carmichael ticket office to pick up a reserved ticket for themselves and their immediate family. Please be sure to display your UNC One Card or UNC Hospitals ID when picking up your ticket(s).

**NOTE:** UNC One Cards, UNC Hospital IDs and complimentary passes are not valid for post-season ACC and NCAA Championship events. **Postdoc Scholars are not eligible to participate in the student lottery.**

#### 8. Can my appointment be discontinued? What are my rights?<sup>1</sup>

A Postdoctoral appointment may end due to the Postdoc's resignation, discontinuation of the Postdoc's appointment, or dismissal for cause. A Postdoc may challenge a discontinuation or dismissal through the formal or informal dispute resolution procedures described in the [Postdoctoral Scholar Policy](#) on our website. A formal grievance must be filed within 14 calendar days of the date of the notice of discontinuation. If the Postdoc is here on a university-sponsored non-immigrant status, discontinuation or dismissal should be coordinated with OPA and ISSS prior to giving any notice of the discontinuation or dismissal whenever possible. Postdocs are not eligible for severance pay or for payout of vacation leave, sick leave, or parental leave.

#### 9. What is the maximum term of appointment for postdocs?<sup>1</sup>

The maximum term of appointment for a Postdoctoral Scholar is **five years**. Following this five-year training period, a Postdoctoral Scholar must either be hired into an established employee position, separated with a minimum of sixty calendar days notice, or receive prior approval to work beyond the five year limit (i.e., an extension).

To request an extension of maximum term of appointment, Mentors should complete a Request for Extension of Maximum Term of Appointment Form detailing the exceptional circumstances that require an extended maximum term of appointment. The form must be signed by the postdoc, their mentor, and the applicable department chair (or dean or director, when appropriate) and be submitted to the Vice Chancellor of Research for approval no later than 90 days before the end of the postdoc's maximum five year term of appointment. Requests for extensions are reviewed on a case-by-case basis, and possible reasons for requesting extension include need for additional time to experience multiple fields of study, to complete ongoing research or to finish/publish articles.

Extensions may also be considered in cases where a Postdoc began research in a new field, took an extended leave of absence for personal reasons, or conducted research under a grant that extends beyond the maximum five-year period.

For more information please visit the [Postdoctoral Scholar Policy](#) on our website.

#### 10. What do the different titles mean, and how do they affect my taxes?

**Postdoctoral Fellow/Trainee**—An individual with an earned doctorate, who holds a *sponsored postdoctoral fellowship or traineeship*, who is engaged in postdoctoral training through research for a fixed period of time, but no more than five years, and *receives a stipend or training allowance*.

**Postdoctoral Research Associate**—An individual with an earned doctorate, who is engaged in postdoctoral training through research for a fixed period of time, but no more than five years, and *receives compensation for services performed*.

A Postdoctoral Fellow/Trainee is exempt from the Federal Insurance Contribution Act (FICA); a Postdoctoral Research Associate is not. For postdocs categorized as a Postdoctoral Fellow/Trainee, completion of the “Certification of Non-Service Requirements of Scholarship/ Fellowship for Social Security Withholding Purposes” form certifies that the postdoctoral fellow/trainee meets the criteria for FICA tax exemption. The form can be accessed at <https://hr.unc.edu/files/2017/08/Certification-of-Non-Service-Requirement-of-Scholarship-Fellowship.doc>.

The FICA tax exemption pertains to stipends and training allowances associated with fellowships, traineeships, or services as an independent contractor that are carried out at UNC-Chapel Hill. These stipends and training allowances are **not** subject to the FICA tax because the payments are not compensation for services as an employee.<sup>2</sup>

For more information on this policy, see <http://financepolicy.unc.edu/policy-procedure/1111-student-employee-fica-exemption/>.

<sup>1</sup> For our most current policies, check our Postdoc Resources webpage <http://research.unc.edu/offices/postdoctoral-affairs/postdocs/>.

<sup>2</sup> Condensed from <https://hr.unc.edu/employees/policies/ehra-non-faculty-policies/>

#### OFFICE LOCATIONS:

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