



Cornell University

Office of the
Vice Provost for Research
Robert C. Richardson
Senior Vice Provost for Research
F.R., Newman Professor of Physics
222 Day Hall
Ithaca, New York 14853-2801
t. 607.255.7200
f. 607.255.9030
e. rcr2@cornell.edu

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MEMORANDUM

To: Associate Deans, Department Heads and Directors

From: Robert C. Richardson, Senior Vice Provost for Research

Subject: New Postdoctoral Associate salary minimum

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert C. Richardson".

You may recall a research study undertaken in Spring 2001 that examined the contributions, conditions of employment, and experiences of postdoctoral scholars at Cornell. Several of the study recommendations were acted upon. Postdoctoral Associates were classified as University employees and standardized benefits packages were established. The Office of Post Doctoral Studies was created in 2004. Another recommendation – to establish a minimum standard of compensation for Postdoctoral Associates – is now being enacted.

The current postdoctoral salary minimum is outdated, having last been set by the Vice President for Research in the mid-1990's. Earlier this year I asked the Local Advisory Council (LAC) of the Faculty Senate to review the salaries presently paid to Postdoctoral Associates at Cornell and to recommend an appropriate salary structure while recognizing the differences in cultures and norms across the broad range of academic disciplines in which Postdoctoral Associates are employed. The LAC examined the salaries paid to more than 350 Postdoctoral Associates in Ithaca and Geneva, and met with some department chairs and other faculty. Their recommendation was that Cornell adopt the National Institutes of Health (NIH) National Research Service Award (NRSA) stipend schedule as the basis for a Postdoctoral Associate salary minimum at Cornell.

There were several reasons the LAC chose the NRSA schedule as the benchmark. First, when the committee examined the actual salaries paid to Cornell Postdoctoral Associates there was a common consensus that in a large number of cases the compensation levels were appallingly low, and the NRSA standard should be considered as a floor rather than an ideal level of compensation. Second, Weill Medical College has already adopted the NRSA schedule as a standard and there is recognition that a certain amount of parity between the two campuses is desirable. Finally, the NRSA schedule is a nationally respected standard that is updated each year and readily accessible to PI's or department administrator's making for streamlined policy implementation.

I presented the LAC policy statement to the Academic Deans in May and, with their support, I have accepted the LAC recommendation. Accordingly, the Office of the Vice Provost for Research has established a schedule that will lead to the minimum salary for a Postdoctoral Associate at Cornell (excluding Weill Medical College) being set at the 0 years of experience stipend level established by the NRSA program. Information about the NRSA program, including the 2006 NRSA stipend schedule, can be found at: <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-06-026.html>. It is important to note that the NRSA stipend schedule is updated in January each year.

The new postdoctoral salary minimum will be phased in over a five-year period. In the first year, the fulltime salary minimum for a Postdoctoral Associate will be set at 87.5% of the NRSA 0 years of experience stipend level. For example, the current NRSA 0 years of experience stipend for 2006 is \$36,996. The Cornell minimum Postdoctoral Associate salary would be 87.5% of that amount, or \$32,372. Each January the percentage will increase as follows:

- 2007: 87.5% of the NRSA postdoc 0 years experience stipend.
- 2008: 90% of the NRSA postdoc 0 years experience stipend.
- 2009: 92.5% of the NRSA postdoc 0 years experience stipend.
- 2010: 95% of the NRSA postdoc 0 years experience stipend.
- 2011: 97.5% of the NRSA postdoc 0 years experience stipend.
- 2012: 100% of the NRSA postdoc 0 years experience stipend.

After the five-year phase-in, all Postdoctoral Associates' salaries will meet or exceed the annual minimum set by the NIH NRSA. Departments are encouraged, however, to achieve parity with the minimums set by the NIH NRSA as quickly as possible.

Implementation of the new minimum will begin in 2007, after the January release of the NRSA stipend schedule. Departments and faculty supervisors should begin planning now to raise any Postdoctoral Associate with a salary below 87.5% of the 2007 NRSA 0 years experience stipend level to the new minimum or more by June 30, 2007.

Occasionally there are circumstances that may require a deviation from this policy. The LAC identified the following exceptions to the policy:

1. Postdoctoral Associates who are wholly based in a foreign location (where the cost of living is significantly less than Ithaca, or Geneva, N.Y. and where the payment of the normal postdoctoral associate minimum salary would create unusual ethical and or cultural difficulties) and who make only infrequent short-term visits to the Ithaca/Geneva campus (one or two visits per year) may be appointed at a salary level below the minimum but at a level of compensation commensurate with their foreign base of operation.
2. When a Postdoctoral Associate receives a portion of their compensation directly from an external source (e.g., an employer or a foreign government), the sum of the individual's Cornell salary plus the external compensation must meet the minimum salary requirement.

Please note that this policy does not apply to Postdoctoral Fellows. While a Postdoctoral Associate is an employee of the University receiving a salary paid through the payroll system, a Postdoctoral Fellow receives a fellowship award, typically from an external source, with terms and conditions (including financial compensation) set by the awarding organization. Fellowship awards are not paid through the payroll system.

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