

Commission on Research

RESOLUTION TO CLARIFY ELIGIBILITY FOR POSTDOCTORAL ASSOCIATE STATUS

COR 2024-25A

Draft Notice Sent to University Council Cabinet	February 13, 2025
First Reading by Commission on Research	March 6, 2025
Approval by Commission on Research	March 28, 2025
First Reading by Faculty Senate	March 7, 2025
Approval by Faculty Senate	April 4, 2025
Staff Senate Comment	March 14, 2025
Administrative and Professional Faculty Senate Comment	March 17, 2025
Graduate and Professional Student Senate Comment	February 28, 2025
Undergraduate Student Senate Waived Right to Comment	March 28, 2025
First Reading, University Council	April 21, 2025
Approved, University Council	Date
Approved, President	Date
Approved, Board of Visitors	Date
Effective Date	Upon Approval

WHEREAS, the Faculty Handbook describes the position titles and duties of all faculty; and

WHEREAS, postdoctoral associate, a subcategory of research faculty, is an individual holding a doctoral degree who is engaged in a temporary period of mentored research and/or scholarly training for the purpose of acquiring the professional skills needed to pursue a career path of his or her choosing; and

WHEREAS, national bodies including the National Postdoctoral Association and the National Institutes of Health Advisory Committee to the Director Working Group on Re-envisioning NIH-Supported Postdoctoral Training recommend limiting the duration of a postdoctoral traineeship to five years total, even at multiple institutions; and

WHEREAS, consistent measurement of the duration of a postdoctoral trainee period supports implementation of these recommendations and clarity with university stakeholders; and

WHEREAS, occasional and well-defined exceptions to consistent measurement are justified when in the best interest of the postdoctoral associate;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the faculty handbook, section 6.1.2, be revised as shown below with changes noted in red.

6.1.2 Postdoctoral Associate

The Office of Research and Innovation administers and supports the [university's postdoctoral associate](#) positions. Appointment to this faculty rank is ~~usually reserved~~ for persons ~~with a terminal degree who have been awarded a doctoral degree no more than four years prior to the effective date of the appointment with a minimum of one year of eligibility remaining and~~ are engaged in research for a restricted period under the direction of faculty mentors. The position of postdoctoral associate is intended to be a limited-term traineeship ~~lasting two to four years (not to exceed five years)~~, during which the individual works under the supervision of one or more faculty mentors in preparation for a career in academe or research. Funding is usually from a grant, contract, or a postdoctoral fellowship. Postdoctoral associates are considered temporary or short-term appointments by definition and ~~are always on restricted not appropriate for regular~~ appointments. See section 2.6.2 for more information about restricted appointments.

Individuals are eligible to be postdoctoral associates for a ~~The maximum cumulative allowable duration of employment for a postdoctoral associate held by a single individual, even at multiple institutions,~~ five years, including prior experience in a postdoc position at another institution. Generally, eligibility is calculated from the date of conferral of a terminal degree. Appointment to this faculty rank is usually for persons who have been awarded a doctoral degree no more than four years prior to the effective date of the appointment with a minimum of one year of eligibility remaining. ~~The maximum allowable time an individual may be employed in the rank of postdoctoral associate at Virginia Tech is five years.~~ Continued appointment beyond five years ~~would~~ requires a promotion in rank. Exceptions for extenuating circumstances may be made by the Office of Research and Innovation.

Typically, postdoctoral associates have very limited responsibility for project management, supervision of personnel, or design of the research project on which they are funded. Rather, the position enables the individual to continue studies in a specialty area while gaining practical experience in the field. The postdoctoral traineeship may include opportunities to write and submit grant proposals. With the approval of the department head, chair, or school director, the postdoctoral associate may serve as co-principal investigator. In certain cases (such as young career award proposals), a postdoctoral associate is permitted to submit a grant as a principal investigator. Requests for principal investigator status may be submitted to the Office of Research and Innovation.

Searches are not required to fill a postdoctoral associate position. ~~Review by the Office of Research and Innovation is required before an offer is made.~~

We discussed COR 2024-25A at Cabinet on Friday and there were a couple of suggestions from Cabinet members we wanted to bring to your attention for COR's consideration.

We suggest removing the word "senior" from "senior faculty" in terms of eligibility for mentoring postdocs. As written, it seems to exclude untenured faculty from being postdoc mentors. It raised a larger question of whether such eligibility is defined anywhere, or could anyone at any faculty rank/track supervise a postdoc? That issue may not be within the scope of this resolution, but it is something for COR to consider in the future.



Graduate and Professional Student Senate (GPSS)

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Comment on COR 2024-25A:

The Graduate and Professional Student Senate has no comments on COR 2024-25A: Resolution to Clarify Eligibility for Postdoctoral Associate Status. We support the resolution as written.

On behalf of the Graduate and Professional Student Senate,
Ronnie Mondal
President



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ADHOC COMMITTEES

Staff Senate

<http://www.staffsenate.vt.edu/>

March 14, 2025

To: Vice President of Policy and Governance

The Staff Senate Committee on Policy and Issues has reviewed and approves COR Resolution 2024-25A.

We have no further comment.

**Thank you,
Amber Robinson, Chair Staff Senate Policies and
Issues Committee**



Administrative and Professional Faculty Senate

<https://governance.vt.edu/ap-faculty-senate.php>

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March 17, 2025

To: Vice President of Policy and Governance

From: A/P Faculty Senate Polices and Issues Committee

The A/P Faculty Senate Polices and Issues Committee has reviewed and approves/endorsees the Commission on Research 2024-25A to Clarify Eligibility for Postdoctoral Associate Status.

One comment was received:

Regarding this statement "Exceptions for extenuating circumstances may be made by the Office of Research and Innovation." There should always remain an option for 'extenuating circumstances' as this may be quite common as VT expands postdoc recruitment. This process should be clear and should be viable. Given the state of international travel, DEI upheaval, etc., it will be unfair to punish individual postdocs, the PI, and ultimately VT for circumstances beyond their control. Additionally, the group should consider women who choose to take time to have children. This should "stop the clock" so that they are not punished.

We have no further comment.