Resolution to Extend Term Limit for Postdoctoral Associate Faculty Appointment
Commission on Faculty Affairs
Resolution CFA 2020-21G

First reading, CFA March 5, 2021
Approved, CFA March 19, 2021
Faculty Senate Review March 13, 2021
Staff Senate Review April 2, 2021
Graduate Student Assembly Review March 31, 2021
Student Government Association Review March 5, 2021
First reading, University Council April 19, 2021
Second reading, University Council May 3, 2021
Approved, President
Approved, Board of Visitors
Effective date Upon approval by BOV

WHEREAS, the National Institutes of Health (NIH), National Science Foundation (NSF), and National Postdoctoral Association define a postdoctoral (postdoc) scholar as an individual who has received a doctoral degree (or equivalent) and is engaged in a temporary and defined period of mentored advanced training to enhance the professional skills and research independence needed to pursue their chosen career path; and

WHEREAS, postdoctoral scholars are critical to the university community and to Virginia Tech’s achievement of its research, service, and education missions and priorities; and

WHEREAS, in 2019 the university’s Commission on Research postdoctoral working group identified Virginia Tech’s four-year limit on postdoc appointments as incompatible with national practice, an obstacle to the recruitment of postdocs, and a hinderance to the progression of their careers; and

WHEREAS, Cornell, N.C. State, Penn State, Stanford, and Virginia Commonwealth University, among many other universities, have established a five-year limit for postdoc appointments;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the maximum cumulative allowable duration of employment for a postdoctoral associate at Virginia Tech will be five years, including appointments at other institutions as a postdoc; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Faculty Handbook and all university documents will be revised accordingly.
March 31, 2021

The Graduate Student Assembly reviewed the Commission on Faculty Affairs (CFA) 2020-21G Resolution and provided the comment(s) below.

Members of the Graduate Student Assembly support this resolution with respect to the aspect of removing what may be a barrier to Postdoctoral Associates recruitment and progression. However, we have the following concerns:

1. There is no clarity on how the four-year term is a hindrance to Postdoc progression. How will an additional year address this as opposed to progression within the university to a Senior Researcher or a Research Faculty role?
2. Given the ongoing labor exploitation crisis, particularly among international PhDs, how does extending the Postdoc limit to five years work to address these insidious labor practices?
3. The resolution cites peer institutions with a five-year limit, a lot of those peer institutions and others also have very strong existing structures to support Postdoctoral Associates. This includes things as simple as comprehensive websites for centralized information to current and prospective Postdocs, advocacy, career development, and networking organizations, institutional Fellowships, among others. The GSA recommends that Virginia Tech provide (or if already available, better publicize) such resources to Postdoctoral Associates.
4. The GSA recommends further actions to accompany this extension. We believe there is more to be done for improving the experience and quality of life of Postdoctoral Associates than simply extending the length of appointment. We believe Virginia Tech should take initiative and lead in creating a better environment for Postdocs rather than follow the status-quo of national practices.

Thank you,

Maruf Hoque, President
Virginia Tech Graduate Student Assembly
2020-2021
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Staff Senate
http://www.staffsenate.vt.edu/

April 2, 2021

To: Vice President of Policy and Governance

The Staff Senate Committee on Policy and Issues has reviewed and approves CFA Resolutions 2020-2021G. We have no comment at this time.

Thank you,
LaTawnya Burleson, Chair Staff Senate Policies and Issues Committee