SMU

Office of Research and Graduate Studies

Minutes of the Graduate Council
December 12, 2019

Members in Attendance:

Mark Chancey, Amy Freund, Kevin Hofeditz, Alan Itkin, Duncan MacFarlane, Renee McDonald, Daniel Millimet, Anthony Petrosino, James E. Quick, Dinesh Rajan, Johannes Tausch, Paul Yovanoff

Ex officio members: Suku Nair, Heather Shaw

Business:

- **Introductions:** Dr. Quick announced that Dr. Suku Nair would be joining the committee as an ex officio member. He will serve as a liaison to the Faculty Senate, where he serves as Chair of the Research and Graduate Education Committee. The Council members introduced themselves to Dr. Nair.

- **Approval of the summary of the November 5th meeting:** A motion was made to approve the summary of the November 5th Graduate Council meeting. The motion was seconded and approved by all members of the Graduate Council.

- **Approval of the minutes of the November 13th meeting:** A motion was made to approve the minutes of the November 13th Graduate Council meeting. The motion was seconded and approved by all members of the Graduate Council.

- **Agenda items for 2019-20:** The current list of items for the Graduate Council to discuss this academic year was presented. See slide 3 in the attached PowerPoint. Dr. Quick explained that the Graduate Council will prioritize items that will affect how the new Moody School of Graduate and Advanced Studies will interface with the other SMU schools and colleges.

- **Proposed administrative functions of the Moody School of Graduate and Advanced Studies:** Dr. MacFarlane presented a summary of the previous discussion of this item, including areas of agreement and disagreement. See slides 13-17 in the attached PowerPoint. While the Council agrees on how the Moody School would work with the other schools to perform administrative functions for Ph.D. students once they matriculate, one major area of disagreement remains: the proposed plan for the Moody School's role in the final review of Ph.D. applications and the release of offers of admission to Ph.D. programs.

  In the proposal presented to the Graduate Council previously by Dr. Itkin, the Assistant Dean of the Moody School would perform the final review of applications for those selected for admission to a Ph.D. program. The Assistant Dean would release the offer of admission when the application was complete and met university standards and would consult with the Associate Dean in the

appropriate school if there were questions or concerns. Dr. MacFarlane explained that the Lyle Faculty and Dean's Office feel that this extra review is unnecessary, decreases efficiency, and takes a decision away from the program faculty that properly rests with them. Dr. MacFarlane proposed that the Moody School could help programs and schools admit better Ph.D. students by reviewing applications as a whole at the end of the application cycle and providing feedback based on a summary of application statistics. Members of the Council raised one additional concern about the original proposal: allowing the Moody School to exercise final review of applications gives the Dean of that school too much authority to second-guess decisions made by the other schools and colleges. Depending on who the Dean is, this power could be abused.

Dr. Quick responded to the concerns raised by Dr. MacFarlane and other members of the Council. He explained that the Moody School will operate differently from other schools: the Graduate Council, comprised of faculty from the different schools, will be empowered to review and set policies. The Graduate Council will therefore be able to check a Dean's abuse of this or any other power in the Moody School's relationship with the other schools and colleges. Dr. Quick also explained that the Office of Research and Graduate Studies does currently review admission statistics after the end of the graduate admission cycle, as Dr. MacFarlane recommended.

Members of the committee raised additional points in favor of the Moody School performing final review of applications to SMU's Ph.D. programs. Review by the Moody School would catch issues that may not have been noticed at the level of departmental review. The Office of Research and Graduate Studies, in performing the final review for Dedman College Ph.D. programs, has been able to catch these issues and bring them to the attention of the program, so that a better-informed admissions decision could be made. In cases where the Office of Research and Graduate Studies' review was bypassed, questionable students far below SMU standards have been allowed to matriculate. Since Ph.D. students will be part of the Moody School, eligible for Moody School resources and receiving a diploma with the Moody School Dean's signature, it also behooves the Moody School to have the opportunity to weigh in on applicants put forward for acceptance to Ph.D. programs. Dr. Itkin also explained that a final review of graduate applications, generally performed by a staff members assigned by the Dean of the Graduate School, is a common practice at peer and aspirational peer institutions.

Dr. Millimet proposed an amendment to the plan for the Moody School's review of Ph.D. applications that would address some of the concerns raised: In the case of a disagreement on the application decision between the Dean of the Moody School and the Dean of the school in which the applicant's Ph.D. program is housed, the Graduate Council would be called in as the final arbiter on the admissions decision. This would keep the Dean of the Moody School from abusing the power of reviewing applications and would ensure that faculty have the final say on Ph.D. applications. This proposal met with general approval. Dr. Quick and Dr. MacFarlane agreed to draft a proposal to this effect to present to the Council for a final vote at the next meeting.

In the course of this discussion, Council members raised a more general issue as well: members of the faculty do not know how the Moody School will function and how the advent of the new school

will affect them. Dr. McDonald suggested that it might be a good idea to hold a Town Hall meeting or a series of such meetings with faculty. Other members of the Council supported this suggestion. Dr. Quick agreed that it was a good idea.

- **Postdoctoral appointments:** Dr. Itkin presented a list of topics the Graduate Council may wish to address in developing recommendations to improve SMU's postdoctoral processes and policies (see slide 19 in the attached PowerPoint). Members of the Council expressed a need for policies that address the fact that there are different types of postdocs with very different kinds of responsibilities. Postdoctoral scholars and their mentors in the humanities should not be forced to follow policies that are designed for postdoctoral appointments in STEM. One important difference among postdoctoral appointments is the amount of teaching postdoctoral scholars are required and allowed to perform. Dr. Quick explained that the issue of postdoctoral scholars teaching is currently under discussion among the Office of Research and Graduate Studies, the Office of Academic Affairs, and the Human Resources Office.

  Members of the Council raised another issue regarding postdoctoral appointments: It can often take a long time to hire a postdoc and have their salary processed by Human Resources and other administrative offices. Dr. Quick suggested that he, Dr. Itkin, Dr. Rajan, and Dr. McDonald, meet separately to draft a proposal that would address this issue by moving aspects of the postdoctoral appointment process out of the Human Resources Office.

- **Final transcript deadlines for matriculating graduate students:** Dr. Itkin previewed this item for the next Graduate Council meeting: In Dedman College, admitted graduate students cannot become active students until their final official transcripts for previous institutions have been received. See slide 33 in the attached PowerPoint. This means that these students cannot enroll in classes or receive financial aid awards, including Ph.D. health insurance, until these transcripts have been received. There are, however, often delays in institutions sending official transcripts to SMU, especially when the student has continued to take classes at that institution during the summer term before matriculation at SMU. One possible solution is for matriculating graduate students to be allowed to enroll and receive financial aid awards in the fall semester, but to have their registration blocked for the spring until their transcripts have been received. Dr. Quick asked members of the Council to find out how other schools, besides Dedman College, address this issue. Do those schools require final official transcripts before matriculation, as Dedman College does?

- Meeting adjourned.

Graduate Council Meeting

World Changers Shaped Here

SMU

December 12, 2019, 9:30-11:00am

Perkins Administration Building 311

December 12, 2019, 9:30-11:00am, Perkins Administration Building 311

1. Introductions
2. Approval of the summary of the November 5 meeting
3. Approval of the minutes of the November 13 meeting
4. Agenda items for 2019-20
5. Proposed administrative functions of the Moody School of Graduate and Advanced Studies with regards to Ph.D. students
6. Postdoctoral appointments
7. Final transcript deadlines for matriculating graduate students
8. Other items

- Administrative responsibilities of Moody School with regard to Ph.D. students
- Fellowship selection process
- Classification of postdoctoral scholars and postdoc appointment process
- Final transcript and other document requirements for incoming graduate students
- Responsible conduct of research training for doctoral and master's students
- Regular assessment of Ph.D. students' progress by their programs
- Graduate students taking classes in schools besides their program's school
- Teaching Assistant training
- Processes for graduate student appeals and composition of a committee to review appeals
- Ph.D. dissertation committee membership, including policies for external reviewers and committee members who leave SMU
- The collection and maintenance of Ph.D. career outcomes data
- Processes for selecting Graduate Council members in 2020-21 and beyond
- Plan for removing 0-credit hour full-time status courses from Ph.D. programs

Administrative Functions of Moody School

Proposal (revisions in red)

Final review of Ph.D. applications and release of offer letters

- Once review is completed at the school level, the application file will pass to the Moody School of Graduate and Advanced Studies in Slate. *The Moody School will guarantee review within two business days.* If the application meets university and school standards as laid out in the catalog, or if review forms contain a reasonable explanation of why an exception to these standards is warranted, the application will approved and the acceptance letter will be released.
- Staffing of the final review will be at the discretion of the Dean of the Moody School.
- In the few cases where there are questions, the Moody School Dean or their designate will reach out to the appropriate Associate Dean in the school. Once questions are resolved, the application will be approved and the acceptance letter will be released right away.
- Acceptance letters will have two signatures: One from the School Dean (or designate) and one from the Dean of the Moody School of Graduate and Advanced Studies.

Review of registrar forms, approval of candidacy

- Late add/drop and other Registrar forms that require a “school signature” will be forwarded by departments to the School Dean’s Office for review and signature and then to the Moody School. The Assistant Dean of the Moody School will sign the form and forward it to the Registrar for processing.
- Candidacy forms, signed by the Director of Graduate Studies or Department Chair, will be forwarded to the Moody School, so that the Moody School can add milestones to the student’s transcript. This will allow support accurate tracking of candidacy for data purposes, recognition at candidacy reception, and tracking of progress to degree. Tracking progress to degree will allow the Moody School to alert departments/programs when students are close to limits prescribed in the catalog so a timeline extension may be considered.

Review of leave requests

- Leave requests will be forwarded by the department/program to the Moody School for approval so that the Moody School can work with the Registrar to have the leave noted in the student's record. Students will be asked to discuss the leave with their DGS or Department Chair. The DGS or Department Chair will sign the leave request form to indicate that they have discussed the request with the student. A record of the leave will be provided to the appropriate School Associate Dean.
- Having the Moody School review these requests will allow for accurate tracking of eligibility for Ph.D. Health Insurance and other financial support provided by the Moody School that is dependent on students' time in the program.

Review of timeline extensions for advancement to candidacy and graduation

- When a student is nearing the limit set in the catalog for advancement to candidacy or graduation after advancing to candidacy, the department/program will forward a petition for an extension (generally a one-year extension) to the timeline to the Moody School along with a letter of support from the DGS or Department Chair. The Moody School will approve extension requests and share a record of the approval with the program/department and the school.

Dissertation formatting guidance and checks

- Lyle and Meadows will continue to check formatting for their student's dissertations and provide guidance to students on formatting issues. The Moody School will review formatting for Art History Ph.D. and Education Ph.D. students' dissertations using the same standards currently used for Dedman Ph.D. students.

Approval of graduation, collection of graduation surveys

- The Moody School will be responsible for collecting Survey of Earned Doctorates information. The Moody School will coordinate with departments and the Registrar's office on final graduation lists for Ph.D. students.
- Coordinating the graduate list will assist the Moody School in recognizing doctoral graduates at the graduation dinner or at a hooding ceremony to be instituted in the future. Collecting Survey of Earned Doctorates information will allow for accurate tracking of graduation statistics and accurate, uniform responses to Survey of Earned Doctorates requests for information.

Awarding and disbursing dissertation completion fellowships

- Ph.D. students in Lyle, Simmons, and Meadows will now be eligible for these awards. The award budget will be increased to allow for a larger target number of awards each year to accommodate additional students from these schools. Typically, about 10 awards have been made per year. This number should increase to about 14 awards per year.

Working with ISSS to process international student and postdoc paperwork

- The Moody School will primarily play an advocacy role on behalf of international graduate students and the programs that enroll them. Schools and departments will continue to work with ISSS on this process. The Assistant Dean of the Moody School may be included in communications and asked to provide support for departments and schools in working on time-sensitive issues involving international student paperwork.

How Taking On Administrative Functions Supports the Goals of the University

- "The Task Force was in complete agreement that the role of a graduate school should be focused on facilitating program success and efficiency, ensuring financial support, and providing oversight of University standards for graduate education, but should not reduce or subsume important faculty responsibilities in creating graduate programs and curriculum, and in recruiting, admitting, mentoring, and graduating outstanding students" (Graduate School Task Force Report).
- Monitoring student progress and providing final approval of admissions decisions allows a graduate school to "facilitate program success and efficiency" and to "provide oversight of University standards."
- We expect to see continued improvement in key metrics of student success: completion rates, time-to-degree, career outcomes, etc.

Administrative Functions of Moody School

What we agree on

Presentation by Duncan MacFarlane

What we agree on:

- ✓ **Review of leave requests**
- ✓ **Review of timeline extensions for advancement to candidacy and graduation**
- ✓ **Dissertation formatting guidance and checks**
- ✓ **Approval of graduation, collection of graduation surveys**
- ✓ **Awarding and disbursing dissertation completion fellowships**
- ✓ **Working with ISSS to process international student and postdoc paperwork**

What we don't agree on:

Proposal

Final review of Ph.D. applications and release of offer letters

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- "creation of a Graduate School 'to manage and facilitate non-professional graduate and especially doctorate of philosophy programs to ***build efficiency and standardization across programs***' " *(emphasis mine)*
- *Recommendation 1: Schools, departments, and faculty should retain important authority and responsibilities. Subject to standards and minimums set by the Graduate School, schools and departments should always retain responsibility for:*
  - *1) Applicant review and admissions decisions*
- *Recommendation 2: Charge the Graduate School with the following broad responsibilities concerning graduate education, understanding that specific responsibilities and functions will evolve with time.*
  - *3) Review of graduate student admissions decisions, and appeals of University policy.*

- Under the current proposal, the Assistant Dean is acting as the Moody Dean's designated representative.
  - Why can't there be a designated representative from within the Schools?
- "Review by the Moody School can – and should – occur after the admission so as to generate a larger, more comprehensive view of the recruiting/admission/matriculation cycle.
  - This perspective will be the real driver towards continuous improvement

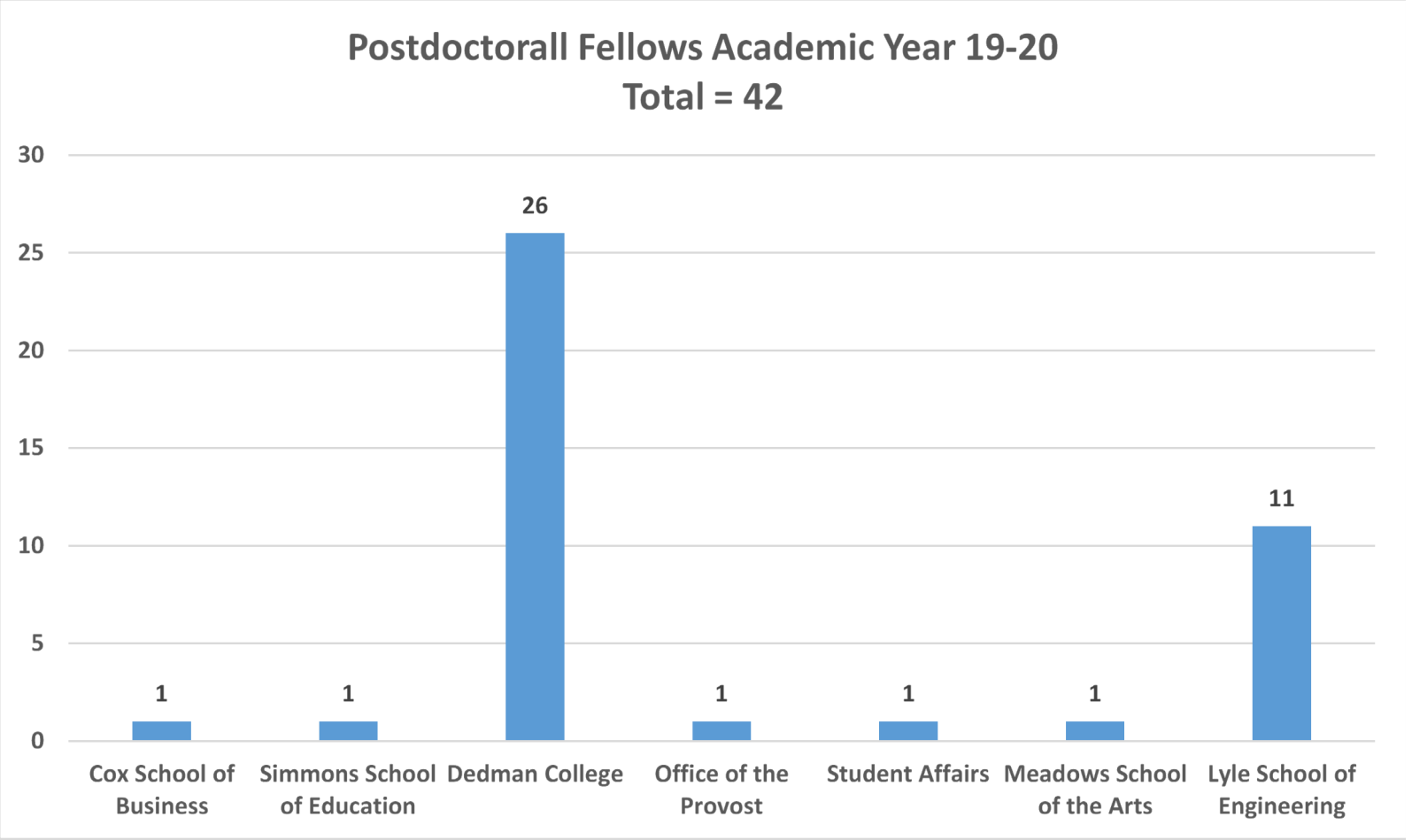
- Add in Associate Dean(s) from the ‘Graduate Faculty’
  - Additional expertise and experience to add to all projects/processes of the Moody School
  - Continuity in case of personnel change
  - Ambassadors back to other Schools
  - If involved in admission, then
    - Retains faculty oversight of admissions
    - Again, more experience in what different types of PhD programs demand

Postdoctoral Appointments

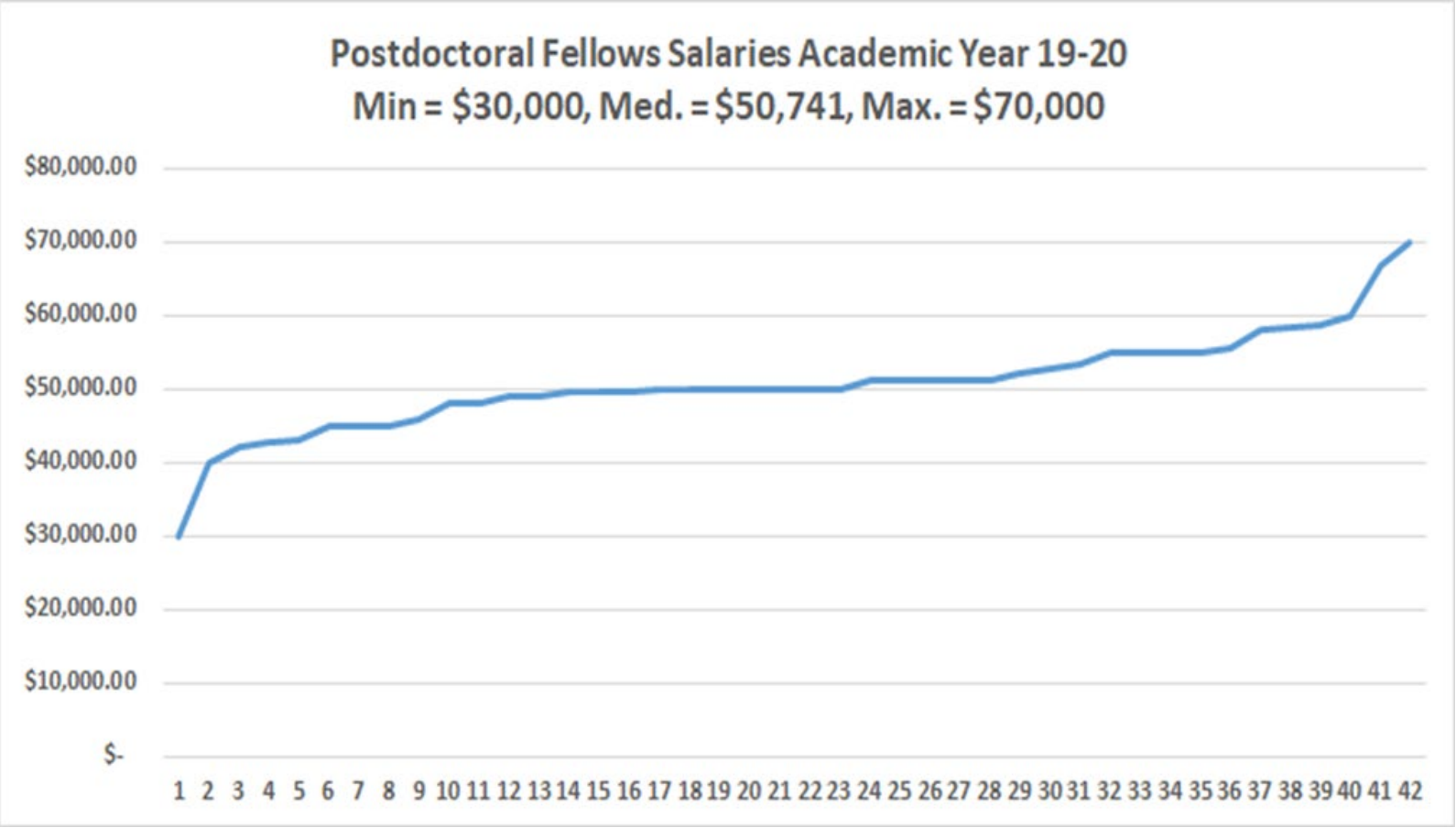
Topics Germane to Improving SMU's Postdoc Processes and Policies

- Onboarding of postdoctoral scholars
- Timeline for hiring– can PI's advertise positions before grants are officially awarded?
- Advertising positions: who should approve this?
- Teaching: how are credentials vetted?
- Teaching: what limit is there on teaching load?
- Proper coding of positions as postdoctoral scholar, research associate, etc.
- Processes to deal with performance issues
- Length of appointments
- Salaries: minimum and range
- Mentoring: what standards and practices should there be for mentoring of postdocs?
- Others?

Postdoctoral Appointments



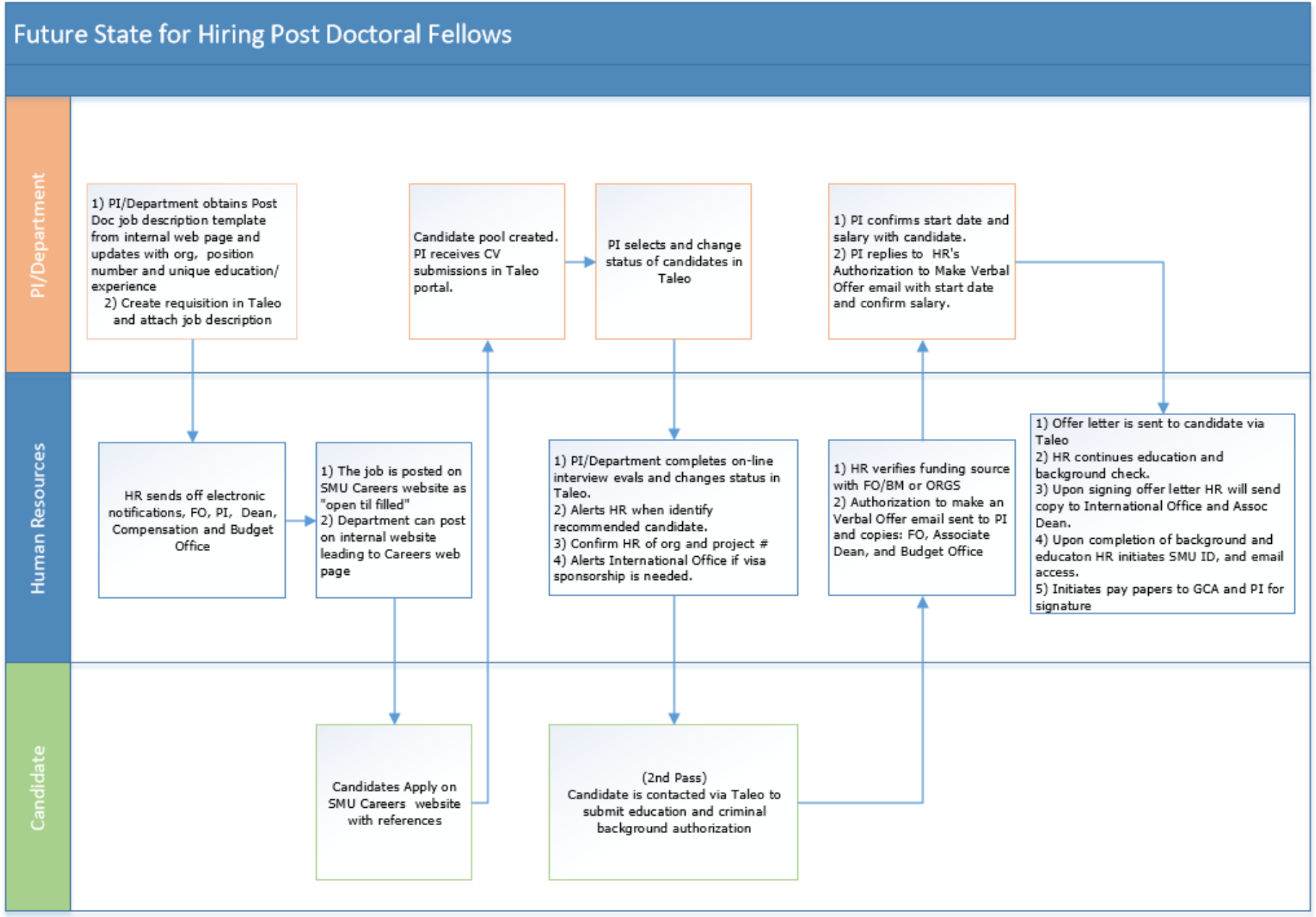
Postdoctoral Appointments



Current Benefits Eligibility

- Full-time Post Doctoral Fellows employed for a limited period of time, typically less than one year; 35 hours per week. Eligible for Medical, Dental, Vision, Basic Life ($10,000), Supplemental Life Insurance, AD&D Insurance, Long Term Care Insurance, 403(b) Retirement Plan (no SMU matching contribution), paid Sick Leave, Social Security, federal withholding, Workers Compensation, Unemployment Compensation holidays.
- Postdoctoral Fellows are not eligible for the Emeriti Health Account, 403(b) Retirement Plan (with SMU matching contribution), Long-Term Disability, Vacation Leave and Tuition Benefits.

Postdoctoral Appointments



Current Job Summary

- The Post Doctoral Fellow plans, organizes and conducts highly independent research for a defined period of mentored and advanced education and training to enhance research independence and professional skills for a scientific or academic career. The position works closely with a primary investigator in preparing and publishing research results in peer-refereed journals and presenting results at national/international professional conferences. The Post-Doctoral Fellow may also conduct own research and gain teaching experience.
- Collects, analyses, and interprets data independently or with little supervision. Anticipates and helps resolve problems that may affect research objectives and deadlines.

Current Job Summary

- Education Required: Doctoral degree
- Experience Required: 0-5 years post graduate experience
- Paygrade: Paygrade 50 - No min or max
- Classification: P

AAU Recommended Definition of a Postdoc

Postdoctoral appointees may be appointed by and affiliated with a department or other academic unit, center or institute authorized to make non-faculty research appointments. These appointees and appointments have the following attributes:

- The appointee was recently awarded a Ph.D. or equivalent doctorate (e.g. Sc.D., M.D.) in an appropriate field; and
- The appointment is temporary; and
- The appointment involves full-time research or scholarship; and
- The appointment is viewed as preparatory for a full-time academic or research career; and
- The appointment is not part of a clinical training program; and
- The appointee works under the supervision of a faculty member or a senior scholar; and
- The appointee has the freedom, and is expected, to publish the results of his or her research or scholarship, which were obtained during the period of the appointment. Postdoctoral appointments are distinct from those of students, staff, or faculty.

Vanderbilt University

- Postdoctoral Scholars are classified as their own type of employee, and have a set of benefits that is similar to but distinct from faculty and staff benefits.
- Postdoctoral Trainees (those funded on a federal training grant) have access to a health insurance plan through the same provider as for the graduate student health insurance plan; the department is billed for individual premiums for this plan.
- There are also distinct leave policies, including paid leave, parental leave, etc. Paid leave is reviewed and approved by the PI.
- Postdoctoral appointments are approved by the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs under the Dean of the Graduate School (PI recommends to Chair who recommends to School Dean's Office who recommend to OPA; appointment letter is signed by Dean of the Graduate School).
- Five year time limit on postdoctoral appointments. Reappointments on a yearly basis.
- Set a minimum salary of ~$50k.
- Benefits website: https://gradschool.vanderbilt.edu/postdoctoral/postdoctoral-scholars/index.php

Notre Dame University

- Postdoctoral Scholars are classified as their own type of employee and have a set of benefits that is similar to but distinct from staff benefits.
- Dean of the Graduate School ultimately approves postdoctoral appointment (requests are sent by the department to the Office for Postdoctoral Scholars).
- Five year appointment limit at Notre Dame (six years including other institutions). Reappointments on a yearly basis.
- Postdoctoral scholars website: https://postdocs.nd.edu/policies-procedures-guidelines/
- Postdoctoral Scholars policy: https://postdocs.nd.edu/assets/132349/policy_for_postdoctoral_appointments_2014.pdf

Boston University

- Postdoctoral scholars who are employees are eligible for employee benefits.
- Non-employee postdocs (i.e. those on training grants and fellowships) have special health benefits.
- Five year limit on postdoctoral appointments (covers all appointments, if postdoc has multiple appointments at same university).
- Set a minimum salary of $50,004.
- Office of Professional Development and Postdoctoral Affairs: https://www.bu.edu/postdocs/our-team/
- Postdoctoral Scholars policy: http://www.bu.edu/policies/postdoctoral-scholars/

USC

- "All postdoctoral scholars will receive the same benefits package regardless of whether they are employed on a principal investigator's grant, paid from a department account, or are recipients of an externally funded fellowship. The postdoctoral scholar benefits package is designed to closely match the benefits offered to faculty and staff and includes health, dental, vision, life, accidental death and dismemberment, short-term and long-term disability insurance plans."
- Minimum salary set at $50,004.
- School Deans appoint upon the recommendation of the department.
- Office of Postdoctoral Affairs website: https://postdocs.usc.edu/
- Postdoctoral Scholars Policy: https://policy.usc.edu/postdoctoral-scholars/

Postdocs at SMU

- 42 staff members classified as postdocs
- No standardized, formal postdoctoral appointment/reappointment process
- No tracking of postdoc success
- No services or resources specifically for postdocs
- No minimum salary
- No limit on reappointments
- Postdocs are classed as staff, receive staff benefits minus benefits assumed to be long-term

Final Transcript Deadlines for Matriculating Students

Summary and Questions

- Currently, for Dedman graduate students, final official transcripts from prior credit-granting institutions must be turned in before a student's record can be activated in my.smu.
- That means that students may not enroll in classes or receive financial aid until final official transcripts have been received and processed.
- In some cases, ORGS waives the requirement and puts a hold on spring enrollment for students who aren't able to have final official transcripts submitted before the beginning of the fall semester.
- How do other schools handle this?
- Should we change policies to allow students to register for fall (but not spring) without final official transcripts?