

Faculty Senate Approved March 24, 2026

CWRU Postdoctoral Goals and Expectations

At Case Western Reserve University (“CWRU” or “University”), a Postdoctoral Scholar or Fellow (“Postdoc”) is an individual holding a doctoral degree or a terminal degree required for the position, and who is engaged in a specified period of mentored research and/or scholarly training for the purpose of acquiring or honing professional skills needed to pursue a career path of their choosing. Case Western Reserve University expects each Postdoc to have an individual development plan created in collaboration with their mentor or Principal Investigator (“PI”) that addresses the following: 1) acquiring the professional experience needed to pursue a career path of their choosing; 2) developing the skills necessary to become independent scholars and researchers in their respective areas of specialization; and 3) contributing to the research and scholarly mission of the University.

Acquiring Professional Skills

To develop career competencies necessary to pursue their chosen fields of work, Postdocs shall:

- I. Make adequate progress on their individual development plan, communicate openly and frequently with their mentor or PI regarding all facets of their training activities, and ultimately fulfill the appropriate training and professional objectives pursuant to the expectations of their individual development plan;
- II. Conduct all professional activities required of them, which may include teaching, research, program development, mentoring, or other advanced creative activity and service with competence, intellectual honesty, and informed by high ethical standards pertinent to their discipline and their appointment;
- III. Develop and improve their professionally required abilities throughout the course of training with the University;
- IV. Treat all students, staff, faculty, and peers with dignity and consideration; and
- V. Complete all required certifications and training programs including but not limited to those outlined in their individual development plan.

Developing Skills

To become independent scholars and researchers in their respective areas of specialization, Postdocs may be expected to:

- I. Engage in research or other scholarly work that will be of publishable quality, advance their goals in a productive manner, write manuscripts and research products with guidance from their mentor or PI, and strive to publish as appropriate for their field;
- II. Participate in writing grants and reports that pertain to their research or scholarly work;
- III. Participate in all formal academic endeavors of their mentor's or PI's research group and/or department to the extent reasonable. These activities may include, but are not limited to: group meetings; joint meetings with other groups having similar research orientation; journal clubs for in-depth discussion of recent primary research literature; participation in disciplinary and society conferences; and regular research seminars;
- IV. Conform to, when appropriate, standards of responsible conduct of research, including taking all required training and staying current on required trainings and certifications;
- V. Treat all members of the research laboratory, team, or department with dignity and respect;
- VI. Promptly discuss with the mentor or PI and disclose to the CWRU Technology Transfer Office any possession and/or desire to distribute materials, reagents, software, copyrightable and potentially patentable discoveries derived from their research;
- VII. Annually complete an outside interests disclosure form, completely and accurately disclosing all outside activities (including external appointments); and
- VIII. Complete research transition and/or other offboarding processes in connection with departing the Postdoc position.

Belonging in Community

As part of the CWRU community, and in support of the overall mission and core values of the University (including civility and the free exchange of ideas, civic and international engagement, appreciation for the distinct perspectives and talents of each individual, academic freedom and responsibility, positive treatment and ethical behavior), Postdocs shall:

- I. Treat all students, staff, faculty, and peers in the CWRU community with dignity and consideration, in part by fostering a safe environment, and refraining from behavior that is threatening, intimidating, causes physical harm or otherwise disrupts another person's ability to complete tasks;
- II. Act honestly and transparently, including providing full and accurate information to University officials when requested;
- III. Make appropriate use of University resources including but not limited to property, supplies, and services;
- VI. Disclose fully and promptly any commitments or potential conflicts of interest in accordance with the policies of the University;
- VII. Comply with all applicable laws while on University premises or in connection with University functions or duties;
- VIII. Comply with all applicable University policies; and
- IX. Refrain from conduct, whether on University premises, at University-sponsored activities, or off-campus, that adversely impacts the University community, the mission of the University and/or the pursuit of University goals. The Deputy Provost or designee shall decide when this policy may be applied to off-campus activities or conduct, on a case-by-case basis.

Corrective Action Procedures for Postdocs

STEP ONE

When issues or concerns arise regarding a Postdoc's performance or behavior, the PI or mentor is expected to communicate such concerns to the Postdoc in a prompt and clear manner, consulting with the Office of Faculty Advancement and Postdoctoral Affairs and the Department Chair as needed. Often minor performance or behavior issues can be

addressed and corrected through informal counseling and discussion provided by the PI or mentor during or shortly after the performance or behavior issue occurs. PIs and mentors are encouraged to engage in informal corrective action communications to prevent performance or behavior issues from continuing or escalating. PIs and mentors are strongly encouraged to summarize these discussions in an email to the Postdoc, and the Postdoc should acknowledge receipt and seek clarification if needed.

PIs and mentors have a responsibility to communicate and document any performance issues in annual reviews and/or as issues arise. Lack of such documentation can prolong the Corrective Action Process.

If the concerns include suspicions or allegations of research misconduct on the part of the Postdoc, the PI or mentor should consult with the Research Integrity Officer within the Office of Research and Technology Management. Violations of the University's research misconduct policies may result in remedial or corrective action up to and including termination. The Research Integrity Officer may consult with PIs and mentors regarding remedial or corrective actions taken with a Postdoc.

If the concerns include complaints against the Postdoc that allege the Postdoc is engaging in behavior that violates the University's *Policy Against Discrimination, Harassment, Intimidation and Retaliation*, the *Title IX and sex discrimination policy*, or other policies under the purview of the Office of Equity, the PI or mentor or other responsible employee must report such concerns to the Office of Equity. The Office of Equity may implement interim measures while conducting its review of the allegations, and violations of the University's Equity policies may result in remedial or corrective action up to and including termination. The Office of Equity may consult with PIs and mentors regarding remedial or corrective actions taken with a Postdoc.

STEP TWO

If informal counseling or discussions between the PI or mentor and the Postdoc have not corrected performance or behavior concerns, or if the performance or behavior concern is significant in nature (i.e., has significant and immediate impact on the progress or integrity

of a project or the work environment), the PI or mentor, in consultation with the Office of Faculty Advancement and Postdoctoral Affairs, will meet with the Postdoc and document in detail the specific actions or behaviors that they believe are in violation of Postdoc expectations. The PI or mentor should cite specific expectations that are not being met.

The PI or mentor, in consultation with the Office of Faculty Advancement and Postdoctoral Affairs, will also outline in writing the proposed remedial next steps to address the behavior or actions. In determining which type of remedial action is appropriate, the seriousness of the infraction (e.g. unacceptable performance, attendance related issues, or misconduct), the Postdoc's past performance record, and the circumstances surrounding the matter should be taken into consideration.

Possible remedial steps may include the following and more than one may be proposed¹:

- Verbal Warning (does not go into permanent file)
- Written Warning (goes into permanent file maintained in the Office of Faculty Advancement and Postdoctoral Affairs)
- Performance Improvement Plan
- Performance Improvement Meetings with Postdoctoral Affairs (goals and discussion points outlined)
- Other Professional Development or Educational Training
- Loss of Privileges
- Persona Non Grata from Certain Areas
- No Contact Directive with Specific Individuals
- Probation: Probation signifies that if meaningful improvement does not occur the next step will be termination, subject to the appeal process available in Step Three. Given that Postdocs are appointed annually, a probation period should generally be for a minimum of thirty days and not exceed three months. When imposing probation, the Postdoc must be notified in writing that unsuccessful completion of probation will result in termination subject to the appeal process available in Step Three.
- Suspension / Investigatory Suspension: A suspension imposed as a corrective action sanction is time off without pay and may be coupled with a written

¹ In circumstances when a Postdoc is a foreign national working pursuant to a nonimmigrant visa, consultation with the VISA office to understand the impact of corrective actions such as a Persona Non Grata, Suspension, and Termination on visa status must occur prior to implementation of such corrective actions.

warning. A suspension imposed as a sanction should not exceed ten work days. Interim or investigatory suspensions may be enacted, with or without pay, while an investigation proceeds.

- Termination - Termination may occur when other, lesser corrective action has failed to correct the performance or conduct issue. Immediate termination may occur in the event a Postdoc has committed an act which violates civil or criminal law, or a knowing, intentional or reckless act which jeopardizes the research project or threatens the health or safety of others.

Unless proposed remedial next steps include suspension or termination, the Postdoc may accept the proposed remedial next steps and acknowledge the behavior was in violation of Postdoc expectations.

Final copies of any corrective action documentation issued to Postdocs should be provided to the [Office of Faculty Advancement and Postdoctoral Affairs](#).

Failure by the Postdoc to adequately complete any action items included in a Performance Improvement Plan or to comply with other remedial next steps within the designated timeframe will result in further corrective action which may include more severe remedial steps.

STEP THREE

If the proposed remedial next steps include suspension or termination, or if the Postdoc disagrees that there is a violation of Postdoc expectations or failure to comply with corrective action, or the Postdoc disagrees with the proposed remedial next steps, the Postdoc may request a meeting with the Dean or the Dean's designee, and with the PI or mentor to seek reconsideration of the matter. The Postdoc may have an advisor of their choice attend the meeting as a support person. Postdocs are encouraged to select persons from the University community as their advisor but may choose external persons (excluding legal counsel) to participate as an advisor.

Requests for reconsideration of corrective action and/or remedial measures must be in writing and the Postdoc will outline in writing specifically what they disagree with. This may include disagreeing that they have violated expectations and/or disagreeing with the remedial next steps including separation or termination.

After meeting with the Postdoc and reviewing the matter, the Dean or Dean's designee will provide a written determination on whether they agree that the Postdoc is in violation of the expectations outlined by the PI and/or the suitability of the proposed remedial next steps. The Dean will use the preponderance standard of more likely than not when making the determination.

If the Postdoc disagrees with the Dean's decision and the proposed remedial next steps include suspension or termination, the Postdoc may appeal the Dean's decision to an appeal panel consisting of the Provost/Provost's designee, the Faculty Director for Postdoctoral Affairs and the Vice President for Research/designee. The panel will review the Dean's decision to ensure procedures were followed and that the decision is consistent with University policies and procedures. If the determination of the panel varies from that of the Dean, the panel may provide for a different outcome and will explain in detail the basis for rendering a decision different from that of the Dean. The decision of the appeal panel is final.

Postdocs with concerns about discrimination or harassment that implicates CWRU's *Policy Against Discrimination, Harassment, Intimidation and Retaliation* or the *Title IX and sex discrimination policy* should contact the [Office of Equity](mailto:equity@case.edu) (216.368.3066 or equity@case.edu).

Postdocs with concerns about misapplication of CWRU's Postdoc policies should contact the [Office of Faculty Advancement and Postdoctoral Affairs](mailto:postdoc@case.edu) (216.368.1983 or postdoc@case.edu)