

## Mentoring Postdoctoral Scholars at USC

*Text for use in NSF proposals  
December, 2011*

### **Rationale**

For grant proposals that include funding to support postdoctoral researchers, the NSF requires a one page mentoring plan that describes mentoring activities for all postdocs supported by the project. An excerpt from the April 2009 Grant Proposal Guide, Chapter II Section C2(j) is below:

*Examples of mentoring activities include, but are not limited to: career counseling; training in preparation of grant proposals, publications and presentations; guidance on ways to improve teaching and mentoring skills; guidance on how to effectively collaborate with researchers from diverse backgrounds and disciplinary areas; and training in responsible professional practices. The proposed mentoring activities will be evaluated as part of the merit review process under the Foundation's broader impacts merit review criterion. Proposals that include funding to support postdoctoral researchers, and, do not include the requisite mentoring plan will be returned without review...*

The USC Office of Postdoctoral Affairs has drafted some generic text incorporating USC resources which may be used as appropriate by USC faculty in writing the mentoring plan section of the proposal.

### **Generic introductory text**

At USC, Postdocs and their faculty mentors are expected to develop a mentoring plan, and agree upon a mentoring compact that will help postdoctoral scholars and their mentors keep their personal and professional goals in sight as they work together. Postdocs and their mentors are encouraged to begin the process of discussing the postdoc's career and training goals early on, to ensure that the scholar will receive the best possible results from their period in training at USC and will be prepared and confident when they enter the workforce.

Faculty involved in [YOUR GRANT/CENTER/INSTITUTE] will provide substantial support for postdoctoral researchers with the firm aspiration of significantly advancing [YOUR FIELD] through the training of a new generation of innovative scientists. The postdocs of [YOUR GRANT/CENTER/INSTITUTE] will be developing their intellectual perspectives, collaborative skills, and use of new research tools and technology in the context of an integrated research [CENTER/ENTERPRISE]. Postdocs will be expected to work closely with advisors within [YOUR DEPT/CENTER/INSTITUTE] to conceive, develop and implement innovative programs of research that result in significant contributions to the advancement of our knowledge of [YOUR FIELD]. To this end, [YOUR GRANT/CENTER/INSTITUTE] will implement integrated mentoring to assist all postdocs in achieving these aspirations through the involvement of those advisors as mentors, additional faculty and research mentors, and organized resources at [PARTNER INSTITUTIONS, IF ANY].

USC has an Office of Postdoctoral Affairs that works closely with the academic units, the USC Career Center and USC postdoctoral scholars to disseminate university initiatives and policies, and to help make USC the university of choice for all postdoctoral scholars. It is the central resource on campus serving as a liaison between the Office of the Provost, postdoctoral scholars, faculty, and staff. The office provides

an annual programming budget to the USC Postdoctoral Association to assist with creating a connected and trained postdoctoral community through professionalization and social events. The website (<http://postdocs.usc.edu/>) serves as a clearinghouse for events and funding opportunities pertinent to Postdoctoral scholars, as well as informing postdocs of the policies and resources available to them at USC and in the city of Los Angeles.

#### **Discipline-specific conceptual knowledge and research skill development**

- Postdocs will work under the guidance of their advisors and with assistance from other senior researchers and faculty collaborators across the [YOUR DEPT/CENTER/INSTITUTE] to develop their scientific and technical skills.
- [YOUR DEPT/CENTER/INSTITUTE] advisors will meet regularly with postdocs to discuss their progress on research projects and to identify and resolve any difficulties carrying out their work.

#### **Career planning and professional development**

- The USC Office of Postdoctoral Affairs is partnering with the USC Mellon Mentoring Forum to sponsor mentoring events and workshops (<http://mentor.usc.edu/forum/>).
- Postdocs are encouraged to create an Individual Development Plan which identifies their professional needs and career objectives, similar to the exemplar developed by the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology (FASEB; <http://www.faseb.org/portals/0/pdfs/opa/idp.pdf>). This is intended to be a 'living document' that is revised as appropriate in consultation with the scholar's mentor.
- [YOUR DEPT/CENTER/INSTITUTE] advisors will work with postdocs to design an individual development plan describing their research, training, and career goals as well as the approaches they will take to achieve those goals. This plan will be revisited and revised on a regular basis.
- Postdocs will be encouraged to attend workshops on career opportunities, resume writing, and interview skills provided by the USC Career Center and the USC Office of Postdoctoral Affairs.
- Postdocs will be involved in training and mentoring undergraduate and graduate students.

#### **Training in preparation of grant proposals**

- Postdocs will be encouraged to participate in the following workshops offered by the USC Center for Excellence in Research: Developing NIH Grant Applications, Writing Persuasive Proposals, Developing and Submitting a DoD and/or DoE Basic Research Grant Application (<http://research.usc.edu/for-investigators/training/>).

#### **Communication skills, including publications and presentations**

- Postdocs will improve their ability to communicate research findings by presenting and obtaining feedback on their research at seminars hosted by [YOUR DEPT/CENTER/INSTITUTE]
- Postdocs will be encouraged to give poster and oral presentations during the [YOUR RESEARCH FIELD/ASSOCIATION] annual meeting.
- Postdocs will be encouraged to attend research writing and publishing workshops hosted by the USC Center for Excellence in Research and teaching workshops hosted by the USC Center for Excellence in Teaching (<http://cet.usc.edu/>).

#### **Training in responsible professional practices**

- Postdocs will be required to attend compliance courses offered annually by the USC Center for Excellence in Research on the following topics as appropriate: Animal Care and Use, Grants

Management Education, Human Subjects Education, Laboratory Safety Training, and Responsible Conduct of Research Training.

**Leadership and management skills, and guidance on how to effectively collaborate with researchers from diverse backgrounds and disciplinary areas**

- In the course of individual and collaborative research, postdocs will develop specific expertise but also strong familiarities in [ANOTHER RESEARCH AREA] enhancing their abilities to pursue cross-disciplinary research as they go on to establish their own laboratories.
- Postdocs will be encouraged to attend workshops offered by the USC Center for Excellence in Research on the following topics: Creativity and Collaboration in the Academy, Obtaining Research Funding from Corporate Sponsors, Foundation Proposal Writing, How to Manage a Research Lab, Technologies for Empowering Research Collaboration Across & Beyond the Institution, and Transdisciplinary Team Leadership.