Postdoctoral Research Associate Handbook

Navigating your postdoc in the

Department of Marine Sciences at the

University of Connecticut

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Welcome to the Department of Marine Sciences (DMS) at the University of Connecticut!

Situated on the shores of Long Island Sound, our coastal location provides incredible scenic ocean views and opportunities for research and hands-on learning experiences. Within the vibrant academic community of UConn, our department stands as a beacon of excellence in the exploration of marine ecosystems and communication for the benefit of society and the environment. As postdoctoral scholars, you are integral to our pursuit of knowledge and innovation. We hope this handbook will serve as a valuable source as you dive into the depths of marine science and embark on a journey of discovery. May your time with us be filled with fruitful collaborations, groundbreaking research, and personal growth.

Postdoctoral Research Associate Responsibilities

As a postdoctoral research associate, your responsibilities encompass a range of activities aimed at fostering academic excellence and contributing to the vibrant intellectual community at our department.

1. Onboarding and Essential Trainings:

Upon joining our department, it is essential to review the onboarding information provided on the Graduate School's website for postdoctoral research associates: [Graduate School - Postdocs and Research Associates](). Additionally, you are required to complete several essential training courses to ensure compliance and safety during your tenure at UConn. These trainings include:

- Safety Training
- Sexual Harassment Training
- Diversity Awareness Training
- Annual Compliance Training.

You can find all of them and other important onboarding information we will walk through in other sections of this document.

2. **Visa and Immigration Requirements (International Postdoctoral Research Associates):**

International postdoctoral research associates must collaborate closely with their supervisors and the department's HR office to ensure compliance with visa and immigration regulations. It is imperative to obtain a valid visa upon hiring, and international postdoctoral research associates may need to engage with the Office of the General Counsel, especially if there is a need to switch visa types during the period of employment.

For detailed information and guidance regarding visa and immigration procedures, please refer to the following resources:

- Center for International Students & Scholars (CISS): [CISS Website](#)
- Office of the General Counsel - Immigration Services: [Immigration Services](#)

We encourage all international postdoctoral research associates to familiarize themselves with the visa requirements and seek assistance from relevant offices to ensure a smooth transition and compliance with all regulatory obligations.

3. **Rights, Benefits, and Responsibilities**

Refer to the [collective bargaining agreement](#) for details. Whenever you have questions concerning your job, employment status, insurance or retirement benefits, or other matters, consult with your supervisor, department head, or the Human Resources (HR) contacts in our department or university for clarification and guidance.

4. **Safety Regulations**

Know the safety regulations that apply to your job and help promote and maintain safety standards. Report any injuries or unsafe conditions to your supervisor immediately.

5. **Review the [General Rules of Conduct](#) and the [Code of Conduct](#)**

6. **Workplace Etiquette and Attendance:**
    - Observe departmental time, manner, and place regulations concerning meetings, posting materials, public speeches, use of facilities and services, and other related activities.
    - Respect the rights and property of others.
    - Use UConn resources (e.g., time, funds, and property) for UConn business only.
    - Report to work in accordance with the established departmental work hours. The typical work schedule is weekdays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on weekdays, unless

your supervisor or department head informs you that an alternative work schedule is required or has been approved.

- Discuss expected time away (e.g., conferences, workshops, vacations) in advance with your supervisor. Consult with your supervisor/mentor concerning any unexpected absences (e.g., sick leave) as soon as you know that you will be unable to report to work.

7. Performance Expectations:

Consult with your supervisor and know the standards of performance and conduct that are expected from you. A quarterly (or annual) evaluation between you and your advisor can be helpful to avoid such outcomes.

8. Conflict Resolution:

Try to resolve differences concerning work relationships and conditions of employment through informal discussions with your supervisor, department head, or HR contacts in our department or university. If you cannot reach satisfactory resolution of problems through informal conflict management, you may use the formal conflict management process.

9. Contributions to the Department:

As postdoctoral research associates within DMS, you have the opportunity to help organize the Friday seminar series as a group. Specifically, this task includes inviting speakers, working with the administrative staff to coordinate their visit, hosting the speakers during their visit, and introducing them at the seminar.

Topics for an initial conversation with your advisor:
1. **Work/Research Objectives:**
   - Create a plan for what work/research objectives need to be conducted.
   - Discuss how you will work together in order to achieve the goal.
   - Clarify expectations regarding the scope of work, timelines, and deliverables.
   - Communicate details, e.g., how often will you check in to provide progress updates and receive feedback?
   - During such conversations, be proactive, make sure expectations are clear, ask for clarification whenever necessary, and think about how you prefer to work and how you want to structure your time.
2. **Individual Development Plan-**

Complete this with your advisor (see below).

3. **Safety trainings (lab safety)**
   - Check with your advisor on what is required and perform any required trainings.
4. **Research Profile and Group Website**
   Postdoctoral research associates should work on a webpage outlining their research following UConn rules and in dialogue with their supervisor, preferably as part of their advisors research group website. For more information on how to create a website: visit: https://aurora.uconn.edu.

Supervisor responsibilities

- Your academic mentor is your supervisor (unless you have been told differently) and it is their responsibility to work closely with you on the research you have been assigned.
- Your supervisor is responsible for making sure you complete the required safety training before accessing the research laboratory you are assigned to work in. This is a high priority and should be completed upon arrival.
- Your mentor will work with you directly to approve your work schedule and support and advise you on issues that may arise.
- Your mentor is also responsible for offering support as you construct your Individual Development Plan (IDP). It is your responsibility to construct the plan, but your mentor should have input. See below for IDP resources.

Appointment/payroll/union

Guidance on [salaries](#) is provided by the university.

The appointment duration and associated salaries are specified in the offer letter and solidified by the contract signed by the department Head and postdocs.

Postdoctoral Research Associates employed at UConn are represented by the [Graduate Employee and Postdocs Union – GEU-UAW Local 6950](#) and are covered by a collective bargaining agreement. Postdoctoral Research Associates and Trainees are not represented by the UConn UAW Postdocs Union.

Training and career development resources

DMS resources
[*Resource map*](#)

A professional development program is a tool set for postdocs to achieve academic excellence and to enhance their chances of securing an upper-level position that meets

their professional aspirations. The professional development program should, minimally, seek to provide skills in these areas:

Research and scholarship: Scientific ethics, research skills, thesis, publications

Teaching: T.A., lecturing, creating and managing courses, teaching portfolio

Professional: Presentations, grant writing, research management, leadership, conflict management

Securing employment: CV and résumé, job application and interview, networking

Establishing an Individualized Development Plan (IDP)

Several institutions have adopted the practice of individualized development plans (IDPs) for graduate students and postdoctoral scholars. The purposes of an IDP are to help students:

– Assess current skills, strengths and weaknesses, interests, and explore career fits

– Make a plan for developing skills to meet academic and professional goals

– Communicate with supervisors, advisors, and mentors about evolving goals and related skills

Benefits of IDP: An IDP has tangible advantages for both postdocs and their mentors. Mentees who have an IDP are reported to be more likely to submit papers, be first authors in papers, and submit proposals than those who do not have an IDP. Conversely, mentees with IDPs are less likely to report that their advisors did not meet their expectations (Davis, G. 2005. Doctors without Borders. American Scientist 93(3, supplement)).

Postdoctoral research associates are encouraged to start implementing their IDP in their first year.

Implementing an IDP consists of three phases, which are carried out by the postdoctoral research associate and the advisor together (Table 1):

1) Questionnaire help the postdoctoral research associate asses their skills, interests, strengths and weaknesses

2) The postdoctoral research associate writes a plan for developing the required skills necessary to attain their own goals

3) Execute plan into action, being mindful that the plan should be flexible and that it should be periodically reviewed and revised in conjunction with the advisor or other mentors

Table 1. Template for achieving an Individualized Development Plan (IDP)

Basic Steps	...For Postdoctoral research associates	...For Mentors
Step 1	Conduct self-assessment	
Step 2	Write an IDP. Share IDP with mentor and revise.	Review IDP and help revise
Step 3	Implement the plan. Revise IDP as needed.	Establish regular progress review
Step 4	Survey potential career paths with mentor	Discuss opportunities with student

Useful resources regarding implementation of IDPs are:

https://myidp.sciencecareers.org/

Career Development Plan Presentation.pdf

Elements and resources for DMS postdocs to implement their IDP

Below is a list, not exhaustive, of existing steps and resources useful (but not required) to implement the IDP.

Research and Scholarship:

- **Annual report:** Ensures periodic review and revision of the IDP.
- **Course MARN 5500 – Professional Development in Marine Sciences:** Provides training in proposal writing and manuscript preparation and publication.

Professional:

- **Attendance to DMS seminar series and participation in brown bag seminars**: training in presentations and engagement in scientific discussion.
- **Presentation in brown bag or Friday seminary series:** Training in oral presentations and scientific discussion.
- **Feng Graduate Student Research Colloquium**: Training in writing abstracts, presentations and organizing scientific meetings.

- **Competitive research fellowships:** Training in grant proposal writing and budget preparation and management.
- **Elements of Professional Development**
  - [How to Write an Effective Abstract.pdf](#)
  - [Preparing an Effective Poster.pdf](#)
  - [Guide to Review a Manuscript as a Reviewer for Journals](#)

Engage in Your Career Development:
- Attend candidate interview presentations and meetings during DMS faculty searches.
- Make your career development a priority throughout your time as a Postdoc at the University. The [Center for Career Readiness and Life Skills](#) offers career consultation appointments and provides workshops, digital tools, and events to guide and support your career preparation.
- [Career Development Events](#) - calendar of live and pre-recorded events
- [Graduate Students and Postdocs Career Support](#) - resources and digital tools to support career preparation in and beyond academia
- [Learning@Work](#) - professional development programs and courses offered by HR and State of Connecticut
- [Handshake](#) - appointment scheduling system for career consultations with Center for Career Development career coaches
- [Affinity Communities](#) - identity-focused groups with specialized content for students (but with resources also of value to Postdocs)
- **UConn's Office of Postdoctoral Affairs**: Provides tools for job searching and career advancement for postdoctoral staff (https://grad.uconn.edu/postdocs/)
- **American Association for the Advancement of Science:** AAAS offers tools and tips, job market information, and a supportive online community https://www.aaas.org/careers#sciCareers

University wide resources:

Join the NPA: The University of Connecticut is a Sustaining Member of the National Postdoctoral Association (NPA), and our postdoctoral research associates can become an Affiliate Member of the NPA for free. https://grad.uconn.edu/postdocs/resources/

Postdoc Listserv: The university also has a dedicated postdoctoral listserv (https://listserv.uconn.edu/scripts/wa.exe?SUBED1=POST_DOCS-L&A=1) that fosters a community for postdoctoral investigators and keeps them updated on the latest funding and training opportunities.

Postdoc Group on Facebook: Our UConn Postdocs group brings together postdocs at UConn and facilitate more interaction. Feel free to get in touch with other UConn postdocs, post questions, and arrange social events. **Join the group here** .

Get access to NCFDD resources: The university is a member of the [National Center for Faculty Diversity and Development (NCFDD)](#)and as such many mentorship and professional development resources are available to you via that resource.

Teaching: Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning at UConn is equally available for faculty and postdoctoral investigators. It offers training in equity minded teaching, designing your course, teaching your course, teaching and learning assessment and professional development resources that include a Graduate Certificate in College Instruction (GCCI) which is a 9-credit program for individuals interested in deepening their theoretical and practical understanding of college teaching.

Funding opportunities

In general, postdoctoral researchers are in a category of employment normally considered ineligible to serve as Principal Investigator, however some exceptions do exist and can be found on the [University policy website](#). The following opportunities are for postdoctoral researchers specifically:

- [UConn postdoc seed awards](#)
- [NSF postdoctoral fellowship](#)
- [NOAA climate postdoctoral fellowship](#)
- [NASA postdoctoral program](#)
- Additional opportunities can be found https://grad.uconn.edu/postdocs/resources/

What to do if things go wrong:

If you find that your mentor or the research you are assigned is not working out as planned or problems develop, you should first try to resolve differences with your mentor/supervisor and if you cannot resolve with them, you should contact your Department Head, or HR representative. If you cannot reach satisfactory resolution through informal conflict management, you may use the formal conflict management process. It is important to resolve issues as they arise and not let them derail your career path.

[Employee Relations](#) is the division of Human Resources that serves as the first point of contact for employees, supervisors, or managers who have questions or want assistance related to conflict in the workplace, policy interpretation, referrals, and consultation on a wide range of matters related to work.

The UConn Ombuds Office serves as a neutral resource who provides confidential and informal assistance to members of the UConn and UConn Health community. The Ombuds Office was established to provide a confidential, neutral resource for staff, faculty, Professional and graduate students and trainees to express concerns, identify options to address workplace conflicts, facilitate productive communication, and surface responsible concerns regarding university policies and practices.

Contact the Ombuds Office at any point during an issue when a confidential conversation or source of information may be needed. The Ombuds will listen to your concerns, give you information about University policies, help you evaluate your situation, and assist you in making plans to address the issue or conflict. You control the process and decide which course of action to take. Contacting the Ombuds Office is completely voluntary and you choose the course of action that is best suited to your interests. **To make an appointment you can call or email the ombud via their website** (https://ombuds.uconn.edu).

Intellectual property and commercialization

The University encourages commercialization of research findings and collaboration with the private sector. To guide you, the Office of University Compliance developed a policy regarding intellectual property and commercialization, which can be found at: https://policy.uconn.edu/2015/10/08/intellectual-property-and-commercialization-policy/. Further information can be found at https://compliance.uconn.edu/compliance_areas/intellectual-property-and-commercialization/.

Additional Information and Resources

DMS Facilities

Marine and Research Operations

Diving	Vessel Operations	Machine Shop	Electronics Shop
IT Resources	HPC Resources	Rankin Seawater Facility	Analytical Instrument Labs

DMS Support Services:

Department of Marine Sciences personnel and their major responsibilities can be found at: https://marinesciences.uconn.edu/contact/. General questions about payroll, travel support, or visas can be directed to marinesciencesbusiness@uconn.edu and someone will get back to you. Todd Fake is our local IT liaison and handles most IT related issues, while Charlie Woods is the building and research operations manager. Boat operations and machine shop work and related issues should be discussed with your advisor before contacting anyone. Claudia Koerting can help with any issues related to analytical equipment, especially instruments in the shared facilities within the building.

Unsolicited, informal postdoc advice:
- Consider giving a seminar in the brown bag series shortly after you arrive to be visible in your department
- Consider starting an unofficial writing retreat or accountability meetings with other postdocs
- Get clarity from your faculty advisor on if you will be writing grant proposals or not
- Consider attending faculty meetings and interview sessions with potential faculty candidates in DMS to sit in and observe.
- Find out which advisors are willing to train postdocs on writing grants

Additional links:
University policies and procedures

Office of Diversity and Inclusion

Employee Assistance Program