

Postdoctoral Association



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Interim Provost Bruce McPheron, PhD
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Dear Interim Executive Vice President and Provost Bruce McPheron, PhD,

I am contacting you on behalf of The Ohio State University's Postdoctoral Association (PDA), a postdoc-run group that is supported by the Office of Research and the Postdoctoral Advisory Council. The PDA's Policy and Advocacy Committee wishes to express deep concern about the current policy of unpaid parental leave for postdoctoral researchers and fellows ("postdocs"). Recently, we discussed this concern with the President's and Provost's Council on Women. The PPCW agreed to support our request to change this policy and advised us to initiate a discussion of this matter with you.

Although postdoctoral trainees play integral roles in the research and teaching missions of Ohio State, they are not granted the same parental leave benefits as other research team members. The current Ohio State policy creates situations where equivalent postdocs are granted unequal benefits. Faculty mentors are either compelled to grant "off the books" paid parental leave, follow the policy of unpaid leave, or, tragically, pressure their trainees to not take leave. Because the future career of a postdoc is in the hands of their mentor, many are reluctant to speak up individually about these inequalities. Overall, these unequal benefits are not only a potential liability for faculty mentors and the university, but also profoundly affect postdocs' morale, pursuit of work-life balance, and the quality and duration of postdoctoral training at Ohio State.

In the attached document, we provide a summary of this problem, and we request that Ohio State enact a clear and formal policy that grants all postdoctoral scholars paid parental leave benefits that are equal to those received by other Ohio State employees and graduate students. Enacting a policy of paid parental leave will demonstrate Ohio State's commitment to support trainee diversity and will support ongoing efforts for the recruitment and retention of women in STEM fields. Furthermore, since postdoctoral scholars are considered mentored academic trainees, enacting a clear and formal paid parental leave policy will also build a foundation to prevent discrimination against postdoc women and fulfill the requirements of Title IX.

We thank you in advance for reviewing our summary, and we look forward to working with you and the University to enact this change which will strengthen Ohio State's position as a leader in cultivating a diverse STEM workforce. Our Policy and Advocacy Committee would like to schedule a time to further discuss this issue and possible solutions. Please let me know a date and time that works for your schedule.

Sincerely,

Nancy E. Moran, PhD
Postdoctoral Researcher
Past Co-Chair and Member of the Policy and Advocacy Committee of the Ohio State University Postdoctoral Association

Why and How to Improve The Ohio State University's Parental Leave Policy for Postdoctoral Scholars

Summary of the Current Parental Leave Policy:

- Ohio State postdoctoral scholars, both researchers and fellows, are ineligible for paid parental leave because they are designated as **'term'** (as opposed to 'regular' or 'temp') employees.
- **Ohio State Paid Leave Policy 6.27 is often misinterpreted by postdocs**, as it does not explicitly state that 'term' employees are ineligible for paid parental leave, and **few postdocs realize they are not 'regular' employees**. There are no available online or printed resources that detail postdoctoral parental leave benefit eligibility.
- **Postdoctoral researchers** with 1 year of university employment are eligible for 12 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave under the **Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA)**, and accrued sick leave may be used concurrently. **Postdoctoral fellows** are ineligible for FMLA or sick leave benefits.
- Some postdoctoral scholars are **granted informal, off-the-books paid parental leave** creating unfair, unethical, and legally risky situations for Ohio State where equivalent employees are granted different benefits at an advisor's discretion. In making these decisions, faculty are pressured by the external factors of current funding availability and research goals while still attempting to balance the needs of their postdoc trainees.

Reasons for Revising the Current Policy:

- **Ohio State lags behind other institutions in their parental leave policy for postdoctoral scholars (Table 1)**. The official Ohio State parental leave policy for postdocs should meet or exceed the standards established by other Big Ten universities and external funding agencies such as the NIH.
- **A formal paid parental leave policy will ensure a training environment that fosters work-life balance for postdoctoral scholars**. This balance supports their training and their essential roles in Ohio State's research programs. By implementing this change, Ohio State's policy would shift from a hidden recruiting liability to a marketable recruiting tool, thus improving faculty members' ability to recruit and retain highly-qualified postdocs.
- **The existing Ohio State parental leave policy for postdoctoral scholars is unclear and inconsistently applied**. This vagueness can result in strained relationships between postdocs and their advisors. Often, the lack of clarity results in postdocs not understanding their benefits until late in their leave planning process, leading to derailment of pregnancy/adoption timing, financial, and childcare plans.
- **Graduate students, staff, and faculty DO qualify for paid parental leave, making the system unnecessarily tiered and exclusionary**. While postdoc training is often necessary to advance to a faculty position in STEMM, its timing coincides with fertility and family formation. Indeed, the average NIH-funded postdoc duration is 4-5 years, and the average age of Ohio State postdocs is 33.5 years. Unfortunately, the lack of paid parental leave disproportionately forces postdoc women to choose between completing their training and advancing to faculty or starting a family.
- **A formal leave policy will support Ohio State's commitment to enhance diversity and will serve to recruit and retain women in STEMM fields**. The greatest attrition of women from the tenure-track occurs at the transition between postdoctoral scholar and assistant professor, thus making the implementation of family-friendly policies critical in the retention of a diverse pool of scholars¹.
- **Considering the age and career stage of postdoctoral scholars and the duration of postdoctoral training experiences, a standard and conventional benefits package should be provided that, at the very least, allows for paid parental leave**.

Recommendations to Improve the Current Parental Leave Policy for Postdocs:

- **A formal parental leave policy** should be implemented by the university to make all postdoctoral scholars eligible for **paid parental leave benefits that are comparable to those of other Ohio State employees**.
- A variety of models are used by other institutions to pay for parental leave. To lessen the financial burden that might be placed on the advisor, we suggest a model of a small (~1%) fringe rate increase for postdoctoral scholars that supplies a University-managed pool of funds.

Table 1: Parental Leave Benchmarks

Institution	Paid Parental Leave	Length	Notes
National Institutes of Health (NIH)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	8 weeks	Extramural fellows receive up to 8 weeks of parental leave per year [1]
University of Maryland	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	8 weeks	[2]
University of Nebraska	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	8 weeks	[3],[4]
Indiana University	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6 weeks	[5]
University of Michigan	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6 weeks	[6]
Michigan State University	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6 weeks	Postdoctoral Fellows are not eligible [7]
University of Minnesota	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6 weeks	[8]
Northwestern University	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6 weeks	[9]
Penn State University	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6 weeks	[10]
Purdue University	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6 weeks	[11]
Rutgers University	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6 weeks	[12]
University of Illinois	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2 weeks	[13], [14]
University of Iowa	<input type="checkbox"/>		[15]
University of Wisconsin	<input type="checkbox"/>		No university-wide policy [16]
The Ohio State University	<input type="checkbox"/>		No university-wide policy [17],[18]

Notes: Table produced from information available online at the following locations:

[1] <https://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-08-064.html>

[2] <http://medschool.umaryland.edu/postdoc/admin.asp>

[3] <http://svcaa.unl.edu/searches-appointments/appointments-templates>

[4] http://svcaa.unl.edu/faculty/policies/work_life_balance.shtml

[5] <http://postdoc.medicine.iu.edu/current-postdocs/iusm-postdoctoral-policy-phase-1/>

[6] <http://spg.umich.edu/policy/201.19>

[7] <http://www.hr.msu.edu/timoffleave/index.htm>

[8] <https://policy.umn.edu/hr/postdocappoint-appc>

[9] <http://www.northwestern.edu/hr/policies-forms/policies-procedures/absence-from-work/leave-of-absence/maternity-leave.html>

[10] <http://www.research.psu.edu/offices/office-of-postdoctoral-affairs/benefits-for-postdoctoral-scholars>

[11] <http://www.purdue.edu/policies/human-resources/vie3.html>

[12] http://rbhs.rutgers.edu/opaweb/umdnj_info/policy.htm

[13] <http://www.ahr.illinois.edu/employees/current/other.html>

[14] <http://www.cam.illinois.edu/ix/ix-a/ix-A-21.htm>

[15] http://postdoc.grad.uiowa.edu/policies-and-benefits/family_leave

[16] https://www.ohr.wisc.edu/apo/links/Postdoc_benefits_chart_final.doc

[17] <http://hr.osu.edu/public/documents/policy/policy627.pdf>

[18] As an example of the inconsistency in paid parental leave policies, Pelotonia Postdoctoral Fellows are granted up to 60 days of paid parental leave.