RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGES IN THE RESEARCH ASSOCIATE TRACK WITHIN THE DIVISION OF BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES

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The Working Group on Appointments and Promotions was charged with reassessing the postdoctoral tracks, including the Research Associate track, and with making recommendations for a clearer, more coherent structure for the Office of Academic Affairs. The group previously has made recommendations for changes in postdoctoral tracks, focusing upon the appropriate designation of postdoctoral individuals into training, staff or academic capacities. Those recommendations were adopted by the Executive Committee of the Biological Sciences Division in December 2003. This report focuses specifically on the Research Associate track, with recommendations for change based on the need for greater clarity and flexibility in today’s competitive academic environment.

The working group considered the issues raised in the Research Aims proposals with regard to recruitment and retention of scientists in the Research Associate track, as well as national trends in academic medicine that reflect decreased numbers of tenure-track faculty in academic medical centers. Our goal was to define recommendations that would enhance our ability to recognize and reward outstanding scientists on this track while supporting the overall scholarly mission of the BSD. In some cases it has been clear that rigid requirements have led to the loss of individuals who could have continued to contribute to scientific programs in the Division. We examined models of similar tracks at several peer institutions, including Yale, Stanford, University of Michigan, and University of Pennsylvania. Based on these deliberations, we offer the following recommendations. We also offer revised criteria for Research Associate with rank positions.

Summary of Recommendations:

1. Elimination of the use of the Research Associate without rank (approved 12/03)
2. Elimination of the use of the Senior Research Associate position (approved 12/03)
3. Elimination of the use of the Research Associate (Instructor) position
4. Development of specific criteria for Research Associate (with rank) positions
5. Specify that all Research Associate (with rank) appointments are co-terminus with funding with a minimum six month notice
6. Terms of academic appointment:
   RA (Assistant Prof): 4 years, renewable
RA (Associate Prof): 5 years, renewable
RA (Professor): WSLOT

7. Eliminate the up or out provision for Research Associate (Assistant Professor)
8. Appointment or promotion to senior ranks would require review at the Divisional level, thought not necessarily through formal COAP review.
9. RA (Professor) could have the opportunity to advise graduate students at the discretion of the degree granting unit.
10. No change in:
    • Status as academic non-faculty
    • Benefits
    • Requirement for national search
11. Support for Aims recommendation for consideration of change in title for individuals on RA track in the longer term
    • Change the title of Research Associate (Associate Professor) and Research Associate (Professor) title to Research Associate Professor and Research Professor respectively.
    • Retain the Research Associate (Assistant Professor) title.
Rationale for recommendations

1. **Elimination of the use of the Research Associate without rank** (approved 12/03)
   See previous report

2. **Elimination of the use of the Senior Research Associate position** (approved 12/03)
   See previous report

3. **Elimination of the use of the Research Associate (Instructor) position**
   This position has been used inconsistently in the BSD, with little use in the basic science departments and greater use in the clinical departments. On the faculty tracks, the use of the Instructor position makes sense for individuals who have completed postdoctoral training, in that it gives them a few years to move to a new institution, establish a laboratory, and obtain their first research funding in preparation for the 7-year up/out period as Assistant Professor. Research Associates do not have the same start-up needs, as they are hired under the umbrella of a faculty member’s research program.

4-9. **Research Associate (with rank) Recommendations**
   The group struggled with the proper definition of the role of individuals on this track. How independent should they be required to be in terms of their research? Does up/out make sense on this track? How can our institution stay at a competitive advantage with respect to recruitment and retention of such individuals?

   *Specific criteria for Research Associate (with rank) appointments*
   See below

   *Term appointments and funding issues*
   While it has been understood that appointment on the Research Associate track was dependent upon funding either from the sponsor, from the individual investigator, or from the department, we recommend that it be stated explicitly that all such appointments are co-terminus with termination of funding. Departments may choose to provide bridge funding, but such bridge funding would not be considered to be obligatory. In order to provide adequate notice of termination to individuals whose compensation cannot be supported from research funds, we recommend that a minimum of 6 months be required for notification of termination of the position. We recommend that departments be required to include explicit notification in each letter of appointment that if funding for a position falls below a certain level (typically 50-75%), the position may be eliminated with a minimum of 6-months’ notice.
We recommend that appointment terms be continued at the Assistant Professor and Associate Professor levels (maximum 4 years and maximum 5 years, respectively). These terms provide a useful mechanism for periodic formal academic review independent of funding issues. Appointments can continue to be made for less than the maximum period of time. Individuals who have attained the accomplishments necessary for promotion to the Professor level would have appointments without specified length of term. At all ranks, however, loss of funding would supersede any term of appointment.

**Up/Out Requirement**

Recognizing that some of our research programs may have suffered as a result of rigid 6-year up/out requirements for RA (Assistant Professors) who may not have achieved sufficient independence and recognition for promotion, we recommend that the requirement for up/out be removed at the Assistant Professor level on the Research Associate track. In the same way that CE faculty may continue to contribute to the overall academic mission without achieving the requirements for promotion to Associate Professor, RA (Assistant Professors) may still contribute significantly to our research mission without achieving promotion.

**Review for Promotion**

The working group recommends that there continue to be an extra-departmental mechanism for review of proposals for promotion on the Research Associate track. This review could be done by COAP or by the Academic Dean. It is our belief that departments should be required to document achievement of promotion criteria and to defend the promotion proposal. This review is necessary in order to ensure consistency across the Division and to maintain the academic standards of this track.

7-9. **Continuation of current practices**

Individuals in this track would continue to have status as academic non-faculty, with no change in their benefits. Should the title change be adopted, those individuals who already hold titles of Research Associate (Associate Professor) and Research Associate (Professor) would not require re-review at the time of title change. As is currently the case, documentation of appropriate national searches would be required prior to any appointment on the Research Associate track. Investigators and departments would continue to follow the guidelines for national searches as defined by the Provost’s office.

10. **Change in Title**

The Research Aims Committee recommended that titles on this track be changed to “Research Assistant Professor,” “Research Associate Professor,” and “Research Professor.” Because individuals at the Research Associate (Assistant Professor) level may not achieve a degree of scholarly independence commensurate with a professorial title, the working group does not recommend a change in title at this rank.
Once individuals attain the levels of independence and recognition required for promotion to the Associate Professor and Professor levels, our group does endorse a change in title to Research Associate Professor and Research Professor. This change would enhance the status of individuals who have merited promotion to these ranks.

Our group recognizes that it in the interest of consistency and clarity, the BSD may choose to include individuals at the Research Associate (Assistant Professor) level in the title change as well. We would support such a change if proposed, but believe there is a good argument for making the change at the more senior levels.

The Working Group emphasizes that the recommended changes in this track are not dependent upon the change in title. We urge that the Division proceed with implementation of these recommendations independent of consideration of the title change.
Revised Criteria for Research Associate Track appointments:

**Research Associate (Assistant Professor)**
Research Associate (Assistant Professor) should be used for qualified individuals who have potential for independent research careers within the framework of a faculty research program.

**Criteria:**
1. Completion of postdoctoral training
2. Evidence of significant intellectual contribution to research programs, with potential to make original contributions and to obtain independent external funding
3. Productivity demonstrated by:
   a. Publication of research findings in peer reviewed journals, ordinarily as first or senior author
   b. A minimum of three letters of evaluation (ordinarily two of which should be from external referees)
4. Principal Investigator or co-PI status is encouraged but not required
5. No specific requirements for teaching or institutional service
6. A minimum of three letters of evaluation (ordinarily two of which should be from external referees)
7. Term: Up to 3 years, renewable

**Decision rights:**
Appointment to this rank requires recommendation by the department and approval of the Dean and Provost.

**Research Associate (Associate Professor)**
Promotion or appointment to the Associate Professor level could be considered for qualified individuals, ordinarily after at least 6 years at the rank of Research Associate (Assistant Professor).

**Criteria:**
1. Evidence of original contributions in a specific field of science either individually or within the context of a research team
2. Productivity as demonstrated by:
   a. Evidence of at least one significant original contribution to a field of science specifically attributable to the candidate.
   b. Sustained publication in high quality, peer-reviewed journals, generally as first or senior author in a defined area of research.
   c. Typically a candidate has achieved Principal Investigator or co-Principal Investigator status in funded peer-reviewed grant applications.
   d. Evidence of recognition through invitations to participate in scientific conferences, symposia, etc.
3. Letters from outside the institution clearly recognizing the candidate’s original contributions and status in the field.
4. No specific requirements for teaching or institutional service
5. Term: Up to 5 years, renewable

Decision rights:
Appointment to this rank requires recommendation by the department and approval by the Dean and Provost. Approval at the level of the Dean may be through the office of the Faculty Dean for Academic Affairs or a designated committee.

Research Associate (Professor)
Qualified individuals could be considered for appointment or promotion to the Research Associate (Professor) level, ordinarily after at least 5 years at the Research Associate (Associate Professor) level. Research Associate (Professors) could be provided the opportunity to advise graduate students at the discretion of the degree-granting unit.

Criteria:
1. Evidence of established expertise and distinction in a specific field of science, with continuing excellent independent accomplishment in research since promotion to Research Associate (Associate Professor).
2. Demonstration of a significant body of work comprising multiple ongoing significant contributions in the specific field of science
3. Continued productivity since promotion to Research Associate (Associate Professor) as demonstrated by:
   a. A record of sustained publication in high quality, peer-reviewed journals as first or senior author
   b. Typically, the candidate has achieved sustained status as PI or co-PI on external peer-reviewed grants
   c. Evidence of national recognition through invitations to participate in national and international lectures, seminars, symposia
4. Letters from outside the institution clearly recognizing the candidate’s original contributions, leadership and distinct status in the field.
5. No specific requirements for teaching or institutional service.
6. Term: without specified length of term

Decision rights:
Appointment to this rank requires recommendation by the department and approval by the Dean and Provost. Approval at the level of the Dean may be through the office of the Faculty Dean for Academic Affairs or a designated committee.