

ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISION HR Division of Human Resources
POLICY NUMBER HR 1.87
POLICY TITLE Unclassified Staff in Research Positions
SCOPE OF POLICY USC System
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RESPONSIBLE OFFICER Vice President for Human Resources
ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE Division of Human Resources

PURPOSE

This policy provides the expectations and procedures for recruitment, appointment and promotion of unclassified staff research positions.

DEFINITIONS AND ACRONYMS

Faculty: University personnel who are engaged in research, instruction both inside and outside the classroom, service and/or administration. Faculty can be further classified as having tenure track, professional-track, or honorific appointments.

Full-Time Equivalent (FTE): A position authorized by the General Assembly that is expressed as a numerical value based on a percentage of time in hours and of funds.

Principal Investigator (PI): The individual ultimately responsible for any sponsored project, and, thus, the primary individual in charge of directing both the research and administration of a grant, cooperative agreement, training, public service project, contract, or other sponsored project. Failure to abide by relevant federal, state, or University policies may result in appropriate sanctions by sponsoring agencies or administrative officials of the University.

Research Grant Position (RGP): A type of non-FTE position that is funded by federal grants, public charity grants, private foundation grants, research grants, medical school practice plans, individual private gifts, externally generated revenue for service or testing activities, and grant-generated revenue, or a combination of these funding sources. RGP employees are not covered employees.

Time-Limited Position (TL): A full or part-time non-FTE position hired with time-limited project funding approved or authorized by the appropriate State authority. TL employees are not covered employees.

Unclassified Position: A position that has been assigned to an unclassified State title.

POLICY STATEMENT

Unclassified staff research positions may be appointed on a full- or part-time basis in FTE, RGP, or TL position types using one of the unclassified titles specified below. The positions will work directly for the PI or co-PI.

Unclassified staff researcher positions will not directly impact undergraduate or graduate student progress toward graduation. These positions may supervise the research being performed by graduate assistants but may not be their supervisor of record. Unclassified staff researcher positions will not serve as primary instructors.

This policy applies to unclassified staff research positions, including:

- Post-Doctoral Fellow
- Research Associate
- Senior Research Associate
- Assistant Scientist
- Associate Scientist
- Scientist
- Senior Scientist

A. Descriptions and Minimum Qualifications for Unclassified Staff Researcher Positions

1. Post-Doctoral Fellow

A Post-Doctoral Fellow is an individual who has received the terminal degree, usually the earned doctorate, in their discipline and is engaged in a temporary and defined period of mentored advanced training to enhance the professional skills and research independence needed to pursue their chosen career path. Appointment is on an annual or multi-year basis, and service under such an appointment is not considered part of a probationary period for tenure consideration. The maximum term limit for these individuals will be five (5) years, with extensions to be approved by the Office of the Provost.

2. Research Associate

A Research Associate must have no less than a master's degree. Research Associates participate in grant-funded research projects including, but not limited to, literature review, data analysis, manuscript and grant writing, and planning and conducting research.

3. Senior Research Associate

A Senior Research Associate must participate in grant-funded research projects including, but not limited to, literature review, data analysis, manuscript and grant writing, and planning and conducting research, and they may serve as the liaison to promote research findings and research agendas. They must have a minimum of five (5) years of experience in the research field.

4. Assistant Scientist

An Assistant Scientist must have a terminal degree in the area of specialty or related field to be hired through a competitive recruitment process into this position and have one (1)

year of post-graduate experience. This appointment serves as a key supporting role in the research program and brings unique skills, techniques or knowledge to the program. This position may manage personnel and resources on behalf of the PI or co-PI and may gather data, conduct experiments and create detailed reports of their findings for the PI or co-PI. The Assistant Scientist will not work on independent research, but directly for a lead faculty.

Senior Research Associates without a terminal degree may be promoted into the Assistant Scientist position with the approval of the Division of Human Resources.

5. Associate Scientist

An Associate Scientist must have a terminal degree in the area of specialty or related field to be hired through a competitive recruitment process into this position and have three (3) years of post-graduate experience. This appointment serves as a key supporting role in the research program and brings unique skills, techniques or knowledge to the program. This position may significantly participate in personnel and resource management on behalf of the PI or co-PI; may independently manage assigned projects and the projects of other program personnel; and may design and independently execute standard research methods, protocols and procedures. The Associate Scientist will not work on independent research, but directly for a lead faculty.

Assistant Scientists without a terminal degree may be promoted into the Associate Scientist position with the approval of the Division of Human Resources.

6. Scientist

A Scientist must have a terminal degree in the area of specialty or related field to be hired through a competitive recruitment process or promoted into this position and have five (5) years of post-graduate experience. This appointment provides scientific leadership in the research program and brings unique skills, techniques or knowledge to the program. This position will significantly participate in personnel and resource management on behalf of the PI or co-PI; will independently manage assigned projects and the projects of other program personnel; and will define goals for research project in conjunction with the PI or co-PI. The Scientist will not work on independent research, but directly for a lead faculty.

7. Senior Scientist

A Senior Scientist must have a terminal degree in the area of specialty or related field to be hired through a competitive recruitment process or promoted into this position and have eight (8) years of experience. The Senior Scientist may direct instructional activities within the research program as assigned. This appointment provides scientific leadership in the research program and brings a unique skill, technique or knowledge to the program. This position will significantly participate in personnel and resource management as a co-PI or on behalf of the PI or co-PI; will independently manage

assigned projects and the projects of other program personnel; and will define goals for research project.

B. Recruitment and Appointment

All unclassified staff research positions with responsibilities and credentials included in this policy must be appointed in accordance with standard hiring guidelines of the Division of Human Resources. See also policy [HR 1.24 Recruitment and Appointment of Classified, Unclassified, Research Grant, and Time Limited Employees](#)

An individual in an unclassified staff research position may not be promoted into a tenure-track or professional-track faculty position except through fair and equitable recruitment. All appointments to faculty positions must follow the guidelines in policy [ACAF 1.00 Recruitment and Appointment of Tenured, Tenure-Track and Professional-Track Faculty](#).

PROCEDURES

Procedures for the recruitment and appointment of unclassified staff follow similar procedures for classified staff as described in policy [HR 1.24 Recruitment and Appointment of Classified, Unclassified, Research Grant, and Time Limited Employees](#) and HR’s [Talent Management website](#).

RELATED UNIVERSITY, STATE AND FEDERAL POLICIES

[ACAF 1.00 Recruitment and Appointment of Tenured, Tenure-Track and Professional-Track Faculty](#)

[ACAF 1.06 Academic Titles for Faculty and Unclassified Academic Staff Positions](#)

[HR 1.24 Recruitment and Appointment of Classified, Unclassified, Research Grant, and Time Limited Employees](#)

[HR 1.36 Performance Evaluation for Classified and Unclassified Non-Academic Staff](#)

[HR 1.85 Research Grant or Time Limited Positions](#)

HISTORY OF REVISIONS

DATE OF REVISION	REASON FOR REVISION
August 15, 2023	New policy approval