IARC Postdoctoral Mentor Plan

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The IARC postdoc mentoring plan is intended as a guide for both the mentor and the postdoc. Both parties should review this plan to become familiar with the duties they are expected to fulfill. As a new IARC Faculty member, postdocs should also review the **IARC Faculty Handbook** for information in getting settles at IARC. This mentor plan further aims to provide the postdoc with the information and skills required to succeed as a postdoc, and with the training needed in his or her next position and future career. Because the University of Alaska Fairbanks is a member of the **National Postdoc Association** (NPA), IARC postdocs are in turn eligible for free NPA membership. Mentors and postdocs are encouraged to take advantage of this web-based resource.

**Definitions**

"[A postdoctoral scholar is] an individual who has received a doctoral degree (or equivalent) and is engaged in a temporary and defined period of mentored advanced training to enhance the professional skills and research independence needed to pursue his or her chosen career path." – National Science Foundation and National Institute of Health (2007)

"A mentor is a kind of guide who, despite having been far enough to know something of what’s down the path, comes back to walk with you, and thus leads without leaving you to follow." – Boyd (1988)

IARC expects that its mentors will support postdocs’ efforts to become excellent teachers and scholars in addition to helping postdocs better understand the University of Alaska’s goals, objectives, programs, procedures, and its academic, cultural, and social environment. Your mentor may or may not be the same individual as your supervisor.

**Compact**

Both mentor and postdoc should review and jointly agree to honor the commitments described in the **Compact between Postdoctoral Appointees and Their Mentors**, a mentoring tool developed by the Association of American Medical Colleges.

**Core Competencies Self-Assessment Checklist**

Soon after joining IARC, postdocs are required to rate their current level of professional development using the **NPA Core Competencies Self-Assessment Checklist**. This exercise will help postdocs identify areas for focused training required to achieve intellectual and professional independence as a researcher, and will act as a starting point for the development of the Individual Development Plan. Adding to or expanding the details of each topic in the self-assessment checklist where appropriate is encouraged. For example, **writing** could be divided into two areas of composition: successful proposals and journal manuscripts. The self-assessment checklist should be revisited at least annually in order to update and quantify progress and define areas in need of further attention.
Individual Development Plan
IARC postdocs are required to produce an Individual Development Plan (IDP) in order to identify their professional development needs and career objectives. The IDP forms the core of the mentoring plan and will optimize the experience by providing a roadmap for activities throughout the postdoc’s term. The IDP is a highly individualized document, developed in conjunction with the mentor. The plan should address both short-term needs for improving the postdoc’s current performance as a member of the IARC research faculty as well as long-term career options. Training needs should be identified, and milestones and anticipated time frames for skill acquisition should be defined. The IDP should be an evolving document, reflecting the postdoc’s changing needs, skill levels, and goals.

The postdoc and mentor should have an initial meeting within two weeks of the postdoc’s arrival at IARC to begin crafting an Individual Development Plan. The purpose of this meeting also includes discussion of broader career goals and the skills required to achieve them. It is recommended that the postdoc bring a completed self-assessment checklist to this meeting. The mentor should clarify the postdoc’s responsibilities and performance expectations including area of research focus, manuscript submissions, proposal submissions, and other duties as IARC faculty. Additionally, it is important that postdocs clearly outline what they need and expect from the mentor. After reviewing and discussing a postdoc’s self-assessment, the mentor will provide advice on appropriate training opportunities. After this meeting, the postdoc should craft his/her IDP using the IARC IDP template as a guideline.

Training Resources
IARC’s goal is to help postdocs acquire the skills they need to develop professionally and enrich their research knowledge and skills.

Research Skills
Postdocs should discuss with their mentor the skills required for successful completion of the research project to which they have been assigned. It is expected that mentors will share their particular experience and knowledge freely with postdoc mentees. If mentors lack sufficient knowledge of required skills, they should assist postdocs in arranging to work with other IARC/UAF faculty members. If necessary, mentors should help arrange for postdoc mentees to spend time with experts outside of UAF. It may also be deemed appropriate for postdocs to take particular classes. A list of available classes at UAF can be found in the UAF catalog. Any course of action identified to promote research knowledge should be clearly outlined in the IDP.

Complementary Skills
Complementary skills such as proposal writing, presenting research to diverse audiences (K-12, undergrads, grad students, general public, policy makers), writing interpretive summaries or vignettes for lay audiences, leading sessions in professional conferences, and networking will enhance the postdocs’ professional development. Mentors are expected to help postdocs find appropriate balance between training and research activities; to encourage and support their
attendance at training sessions, career development seminars, and conferences; and to assist them in seeking networking opportunities and career advancement. Numerous resources available through UAF provide an opportunity for professional development training. Where possible, training opportunities should be identified within the IDP. Following is a brief list of UAF offices that offer various types of training applicable to postdocs:

- The **Office of Research Integrity** is concerned with responsible conduct of research (RCR), research ethics, export control, animal and human subjects, etc. In addition to a web-based RCR Course [http://www.uaf.edu/ori/RCR_Course/about.html](http://www.uaf.edu/ori/RCR_Course/about.html) ORI offers a classroom course in RCR (LAS 601) annually. Postdocs may sign up for the entire class or attend individual lectures based on interest and relevance.
- The **Office of Sponsored Programs** provides assistance with proposal preparation, including budget development, Fast-Lane, training on pre-award related issues and regulations, funding searches, types of grant programs, etc.
- The **Office of Technology Transfer** is concerned with patent process, technology transfer, material transfer agreements, protecting intellectual property, etc.
- The **Office of Grants & Contracts Administration** will provide assistance with post-award grant management.
- The **Office of Faculty Development** is concerned with faculty-specific training programs.
- **Environmental Health Safety & Risk Management** is concerned with hazardous waste management, safety training, etc.
- **Human Resources** provides training programs for supervisors, recruitment and hiring, benefits and compensation, etc.

The above departments offer personalized training to groups of IARC postdocs as needed. Mentors and postdocs should identify the need for, and facilitate, these training opportunities.

**Postdoc/Mentor Research Meetings**

The mechanism for communication and the frequency of meetings will depend on personal preferences, the circumstances of postdocs and mentors, and the size of the research group. During their initial meeting, postdocs and mentors should agree upon a meeting schedule to discuss research progress. It is recommended that individual face-to-face meetings to discuss research progress occur at least bi-annually.

**Introductory Seminar**

Within one month of arrival at IARC, new postdocs should give an informal introductory presentation to IARC faculty and staff, the purposes of which are to make the faculty aware of postdocs’ research interests, to meet fellow researchers, and to establish potential collaborations. These seminars should include discussion of past research and desired future direction. The IARC internal web page has a useful listing of resources for lecture/presentation preparation under the heading of “Helpful Links.”
Teaching
Postdocs interested in academic careers should ask their mentors to assist in finding or creating opportunities that provide experience in supervising, teaching, and mentoring. Potential opportunities include guest lecturing to provide information of a special topic for a regularly scheduled class and mentoring students and interns. The UAF Office of Faculty Development periodically offers workshops and training opportunities that can help develop teaching skills. This is a good place to check for professional development opportunities.

Outreach
Participation in outreach activities is a key part of becoming a successful well-rounded scientist. Most funding agencies specifically request detail on how outreach will be undertaken on a research project. If a postdoc has been hired to work on a specific research project, he/she should clarify with the mentor any specific outreach activities that must be performed. In addition to project-specific outreach activities, numerous outreach activities are also available in the Fairbanks area. Mentors should be able to assist in finding opportunities that best fit the postdocs’ outreach goals and interests. Examples of outreach activities include volunteering time for a science class, judging science fairs, or participating in Earth Day activities. IARC’s Education and Outreach Program provides a number of resources and ideas for postdocs who wish to become involved in promoting understanding of Arctic system science and climate change. Contact IARC’s Education Director Elena Sparrow (x7699; ebsparrow@alaska.edu) or Education and Research Specialist Martha Kopplin (x2794; mrkopplin@alaska.edu) for more information on this program. Additionally, UAF’s Science Education Outreach Network (SEON) provides information on an array of science and math education outreach programs, activities, and resources available at UAF.

Career Advancement
Although IARC postdocs are considered faculty members, postdoc positions themselves are considered short term (typically 1-3 years). Postdocs wishing to remain in academia generally apply for more senior faculty positions toward the end of their term. Most universities have several options available, including tenure track and/or research faculty positions.

Tenure track faculty positions at many universities include a tripartite responsibility to provide teaching, research, and service. Obligations of research faculty are typically bipartite, limited to research and service. Depending on the track chosen, the faculty member will have different obligations and requirements for career advancement. To be considered a likely candidate for promotion, tenure-track and research faculty are usually obligated to demonstrate performance in corresponding areas of their responsibilities. An individual faculty member’s proportionate responsibility is usually reflected through an annual workload agreement.

Effectiveness in teaching may be judged through student ratings, peer classroom observation, and peer evaluation of course materials. Success in research may be judged by scholarly works published by reputable journals, scholarly reviews of publications, presentation of research papers before learned societies, competitive grants, and contracts to finance the development of
ideas. Service components may include service to the university, the public, or the profession. Several examples of each category of service can be found in the Regulations for the Appointment and Evaluation of Faculty handbook from the UAF Provost Office.

IARC’s goal is to help postdocs advance their competence in many of the above areas. IDPs should be developed with future career path in mind. For example, if a postdoc’s goal is to continue his or her career as UAF research faculty, the individual should review the UAF promotion guidelines from the Provost Office to determine which additional research and service requirements he or she needs to meet. Then, with the help of his or her mentor, the postdoc should outline a timeline for meeting these requirements. Keeping track of any pertinent research, service, or teaching activities during progress through a postdoc term, filing detailed annual activity reports, and maintaining an up-to-date CV should not be viewed simply as formalities. These are highly valuable, time-saving organizational tools.

**Interpersonal Conflict with a Mentor**

IARC strives to offer high-quality mentoring to its postdocs. Postdocs who have concerns regarding the mentorship being provided should diplomatically mention these concerns directly to mentors during face-to-face meeting time. If adequate changes do not follow, postdocs should discuss these situations with a supervisor. If a supervisor is unable to resolve the conflict, or if the supervisor happens to serve as a postdoc’s mentor, the postdoc may seek confidential guidance from IARC Director Larry Hinzman. Such guidance is especially important when it pertains to ethics violations or professional misconduct on the part of the mentor. During an initial meeting with the director, the postdoc will be presented with a spectrum of possible solutions, including paths to reconciliation, diminishing involvement with a mentor, or reporting grievances through established UAF Human Resources channels. Solutions will be sought on a case-by-case basis, and discussions between the postdoc and IARC director will remain confidential, unless otherwise requested by the postdoc. If irreconcilable conflict requires a change in mentor, the postdoc’s IDP will also be reviewed during transition to a new work arrangement.

**Performance and Development Review**

Mentors and postdocs should meet annually to discuss the postdoc progress relative to IDPs during the prior year. It is common for work plans to evolve during the course of a postdoctoral fellowship, as new research and new contacts lead to new opportunities. As a result, these meetings should be viewed as a chance to discuss future directions as much as they are an opportunity to assess performance. Where necessary, IDPs may need to be amended in line with new developments in the direction of postdoc work and career intentions. Subsequent to these meetings, postdocs and mentors should complete the relevant sections of the Performance Review form and submit copies to the postdoc supervisor and IARC director. These documented meeting outcomes will form a useful reference to target future improvements. Previous records from performance reviews should be brought to each annual review to be referenced in discussions where required.
In addition to completing an IARC postdoc Performance Review, postdocs, as UAF faculty members, are required annually to complete and submit activity reports from the past year as well as workload plans for the coming year. These forms must be filled out in conjunction with a postdoc’s supervisor, but should also be discussed in reference to the IDP developed with the postdoc mentor. Progress reviews present an opportunity for a postdoc to voice concerns about available resources, working arrangements, or leadership available to them.

**Job Packet**

IARC’s goal is to help postdocs become, by the end of their IARC appointment, well-rounded, highly employable research scientists. Postdocs are encouraged to develop personal job packets to help them move on to the next stages of their careers. These job packets should contain a statement of interest, cover letter, and CV. Upon request, IARC faculty will provide advice on preparing these documents and a subjective review. Postdocs are expected to submit successful job packets to the IARC database along with corresponding job descriptions, so that future postdocs can learn from them. This database is private and for internal use only.

**Exit Interview**

Upon completion of their appointment at IARC, postdocs are expected to attend an exit interview with the IARC director to give each individual an opportunity to honestly assess his or her satisfaction with the mentoring program. Following completion of a postdoc’s term, he or she may also be asked to complete a survey that will allow IARC to track the postdoc’s progress toward his or her career goals. The exit interview and periodic surveys are intended to gather data to allow the institution to further strengthen the overall training and mentoring environment for future postdocs.