

## Department Guidelines for Hiring PreDocs

In the past few years, the number of predocs hired in the department has increased significantly. In fact, the predoc-route has become one of the main paths to top PhD programs. On the initiative of Ilyana and Leah, we have formed a committee to come up with rules that faculty who hire predocs should follow. The committee members are: Mark Aguiar, Leah Boustan, Ilyana Kuziemko, David Lee, Wolfgang Pesendorfer, Steve Redding and Ceci Rouse.

Our starting point is the observation that predocs are among the most vulnerable members of the economics community. They are hired to work with a single professor or a small number of faculty members, often directly after college. Many move to Princeton from other states, if not other countries, often knowing no one in the area. Almost all of them hope to attend a PhD program, and thus need to obtain a letter or letters of recommendation from this experience. As such, the supervising faculty member has tremendous sway over their future careers. Relative to graduate students, RAs are also generally less free to switch supervisors.

The goal of the following guidelines is to ensure that predocs (i) are less dependent on a single faculty member; (ii) have greater opportunities for feedback without fear of retribution; (iii) have clearer expectations regarding workload and educational opportunities.

### 1. Every predoc hired in the department should have two faculty advisors.

As part of the hiring process for a predoc, two faculty members should be designated as advisors. The primary advisor will typically be the faculty member who funds the RAship; the secondary advisor's role is to meet regularly with the predoc, check on the student's progress and, more generally, provide a second faculty contact for the student.

In our department, most predocs are hired by groups of faculty (IES, IRS, or the PF group or the devo group). In that case, the requirement of two faculty advisors is close to the current practice. In cases where a single faculty member hires the predoc, the 2-advisor requirement imposes an additional burden: hiring a predoc requires finding someone in the department who is willing to take on the role of secondary advisor.

### 2. Expectations of the position.

While predocs are salaried (not hourly) employees, so are not legally in a category that receives overtime, the typical workweek should not exceed 40 hours. Of course, some weeks might be more intense than others, but the work should average out to around 40 hours.

Each predoc should have the opportunity (in terms of time/schedule) to take one graduate or undergraduate class per semester. Currently, university rules require that predocs pay \$6,000 per class if their tenure is 6 months or less and \$1,000 per class if their tenure is more than 6 months. Faculty advisors are encouraged to subsidize their taking classes, for example, by offering bonus

payments for predocs who take them. (Faculty members cannot pay for classes directly but can increase predocs' salary if they do take a class.)

At the beginning of the fall term, the department will hold a mandatory meeting for RAs and their supervisors. The two items above will be covered and, in addition, a summary of the guidelines regarding sexual harassment will be repeated ("repeated" because as a baseline all Princeton employees have to take online sexual harassment training annually). RAs will be reminded of HR resources (e.g., the university ombudsmen, the Title IX office).

The meeting will enumerate examples of behavior that would be clearly inappropriate, such as, after-hours one-on-one drinks between a faculty member and a predoc; frequent, non-work-related texting; jokes involving racial or ethnic stereotypes or sexual innuendo; and commenting on appearance or manner of dress.

### 3. Evaluations and Exit Interviews

Once their term of employment has ended, predocs will have "exit interviews." An HR professional will conduct these interviews.

At the end of the academic year, each predoc has the opportunity to provide written evaluations of their supervisors. These evaluations focus on the research experience, the work environment, and the overall atmosphere. The administration and role of these evaluations is analogous to the evaluations for senior thesis advising.

### 4. Further Steps

The guidelines above will go into effect July 1, 2019. Over the course of the next academic year, the committee will continue discussing and refining the guidelines. An updated version will be discussed in a faculty meeting in the spring of 2020.