



**CURRICULUM IN TOXICOLOGY &
ENVIRONMENTAL MEDICINE**

Postdoc Handbook

Updated: Spring 2026

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT CHAPEL HILL

Acknowledgements

The rationale for creating a postdoc handbook was based on postdoc feedback requesting clearer guidelines from Curriculum in Toxicology and Environmental Medicine (CiTEM) and a comprehensive document with resources specific to CiTEM postdocs. This handbook was inspired by the CiTEM student handbook and adapted to fit the specific needs of postdocs.

The writing of this version of the CiTEM postdoc handbook was a collaborative effort, which was led by Elise Hickman, with contributions and revisions from all 2024 – 2025 CiTEM postdocs (Dre' Dobson, Jennie Thies, Jessie Chappel, Syed Masood, Tim Smyth), and assistance from Bernard Weissman, Director of Postdoctoral Studies for CiTEM:

The first draft was provided to CiTEM Leadership for feedback, and the final draft was provided to the CiTEM Executive Committee for comments, edits, and approval, resulting in the final version presented herein.

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1. CiTEM Postdoc Program Overview

The Curriculum in Toxicology and Environmental Medicine (CiTEM) offers a dynamic environment for postdoc training. Collaborative research among faculty in the biomedical, environmental, and public health sciences is not hindered by institutional boundaries or administrative barriers. Postdocs benefit from close interactions with investigators at the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS), the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and other laboratories in the Research Triangle Park, in addition to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-CH). Several centers and programs, including the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs, at the UNC-CH also foster the development of multidisciplinary initiatives in both research and teaching.

The overall goal of the CiTEM postdoctoral program is training post-doctoral scholars to become future scientists in environmental health and toxicology and to integrate knowledge in basic biomedical sciences with next-generation technology to advance environmental health and toxicology in the 21st century.

The CiTEM postdoctoral training program will provide trainees with a solid knowledge base and cutting-edge research experience that will enhance their competitiveness in receiving independent funding, their ability to thrive in any career, and their ability to adapt to a rapidly evolving job market. The training program will also address emerging challenges in toxicology and environmental health through our robust training program including, (1) providing training in data analytics and data visualization, (2) promoting cross-disciplinary research and the convergence paradigm approach, resulting in more well-rounded and adapted scientists, (3) teaching science communication and providing opportunities for community engagement, and (4) promoting inclusivity by augmenting recruitment and retention of trainees from underrepresented (UR) groups and disadvantaged backgrounds. In addition to traditional and emerging areas of research and training in Toxicology, this program offers opportunities for multidisciplinary research that cut across several areas of strength: **Environmental Toxicology, Systems Toxicology, Research Translation, Animal Models of Human Disease, and Biomarkers.**

1.1 Program Contact Information

Program Website: <https://www.med.unc.edu/toxicology/>

Program Director: Meghan Rebuli (meradfor@email.unc.edu)

Business Services Coordinator: David Chapman (David_Chapman@med.unc.edu)

Director of Graduate Studies: Meghan Rebuli (meradfor@email.unc.edu)

Director of Postdoctoral Training: Bernard Weissman (bernard_weissman@med.unc.edu)

1.2 UNC Postdoc Association Handbook

The UNC Biomedical Science Training and Research (BioSTAR) office, in collaboration with the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs (OPA), provides a handbook (<https://research.unc.edu/postdocs/>) that covers many UNC-wide policies, procedures, and resources. The contents of this handbook are specifically tailored to additional information that may be helpful to CiTEM postdocs.

2. Expectations of CiTEM Postdocs

2.1 CiTEM Seminar & Retreat

CiTEM Postdocs supported by the CiTEM T32 and/or Golberg fund are required to:

1. Attend the weekly CiTEM seminar (TOXC722), held from 3-4pm on Mondays throughout both the fall and spring semesters.
2. Present in CiTEM seminar (TOXC722) approximately once per year (as scheduled by the Business Services Coordinator).
3. Attend and present a poster at the yearly CiTEM retreat.

CiTEM Postdocs supported by other funding mechanisms are strongly encouraged to attend these events.

2.2 Conference Attendance

CiTEM postdocs should attend and present at national conferences relevant to their research at least once per year. See the [travel section](#) of this document for additional details related to travel funding.

2.3 Postdoc Mentoring Committee

Each trainee will recruit a Postdoctoral Mentoring Committee (PMC) consisting of the research mentor and at least two additional scientists who provide complementary research expertise and career advice. Whereas the primary mentor provides daily research guidance, the PMC meets with the trainee more formally every 6-12 months, although the postdoc and members of their PMC can meet as often as desired. PMC meetings provide a venue for discussing general issues of career development and foster collaborative research arrangements with other faculty that expand the technical foundation and scientific knowledge base of the trainee. The PMC also provides a formal mechanism for fostering cross-disciplinary interactions with physician-scientists or other co-mentors. The postdoc should provide the CiTEM Director of Postdoctoral Studies the names of the PMC members and the date of their initial meeting within six months of joining the program.

2.4 Postdoc Progress/Individual Development Plan (IDP)

Defining expectations and setting goals within a clear plan for achieving them are critical to a productive postdoctoral experience. Therefore, at the beginning of the appointment, each CiTEM Postdoc should prepare an Individual Development Plan (IDP) ([see representative form here](#)) that identifies their career objectives and professional development needs. CiTEM Leadership recognizes that postdocs may be interested in a variety of careers. As a result, an IDP, developed in concert with the CiTEM Mentor, promotes greater potential and flexibility in acquiring those skills and experiences. Furthermore, IDP assessment should be a continuous process, especially if the training period is less than 2 years. CiTEM Leadership recommends that the postdoc and mentor revisit the IDP once per year, with additional meetings for IDP updates as needed.

Postdoctoral trainees should be deeply engaged in research from the start of their appointment, representing the primary priority of their training experience. However, the postdoc together with the mentor should also achieve other indicators of research competencies, including research proposal/grant writing and project management. The extent to which postdocs participate in additional activities, such as lab management, grant writing assistance for the mentor, and mentoring of graduate students and undergraduates, should be clearly outlined and agreed upon by both mentor and postdoc. CiTEM recommends that at least 80% of a postdoc's time is spent pursuing their own independent research.

3. Administrative Logistics

3.1 Administrative Structure

Because CiTEM is a curriculum rather than a department, CiTEM postdocs are affiliated both with CiTEM and their mentor's department, center, and/or institute. Most often, administrative tasks such as building access, reappointment, and travel reimbursements will be routed through your home department, center, or institute. If you are unsure of how to complete an administrative task or which affiliation handles it, please reach out to the CiTEM Business Services Coordinator for help.

3.2 Onyen and Internet Access

An Onyen, or the OnlyNameYou'llEverNeed is your username for UNC. To create your Onyen, use [this](#) website. To access internet on campus, you will need to configure your devices for the eduroam network. Instructions can be found [here](#).

3.3 Building Access

Certain spaces on campus, such as your lab, may require permission for access. If required, you will need to obtain the proper access card or ID from your department, center, or institute. The School of Medicine (SOM) ID usually consists of a physical badge, and a One Card is a digital ID that you can access on your phone. Different lab locations may require different access cards. For example, buildings administered by the School of Medicine are accessed with a School of Medicine ID, while buildings administered by the School of Public Health are accessed with a One Card. To obtain an SOM ID, first fill out the badge request form, located [here](#). Following departmental approval, you'll be prompted to upload a photo, and the badge will be subsequently delivered. To obtain a One Card, follow the steps outlined [here](#). Note that as a postdoc you are required to pay a \$10 fee to activate either the mobile or physical card.

3.4 Salary, Stipends, and Taxes

The salary stipends for CiTEM-funded postdocs uses the NIH salary guidelines as a minimum. The current NIH goal for stipends for Year 0 (first-year) postdocs is \$70,000/year. However, they have not reached this goal; the starting salary FY2024 for a Year 0 postdoc is \$61,008. Therefore, the CiTEM will supplement the Year 0 stipend level by \$8,992 to reach the \$70,000 goal using non-governmental funds (Table 1). The CiTEM will continue to add in a similar amount for Years 1-7. In addition, the CiTEM will provide the same stipend levels for CiTEM Golberg Fellowships and will supplement other private or public individual fellowships to the same stipend amounts. During the 2025-2026 the postdoctoral representative recommended and proposed moving to a flat percentage rate increase for CiTEM postdocs. This was approved and will take effect during the renewal of 2026-2027 contracts. The approved flat rate increase is 2.5%.

NIH fellowship and T32 awards have specific time limits for support. In addition, CiTEM Golberg Fellowships along with other private and public fellowship also have time limits (Table 2).

Funding Source	Time Limit
CiTEM T32	Maximum 2-year appointment
Golberg Fund	Maximum 3-year appointment
F32	Maximum 3 years total, T32 + F32 funding combined.
Private or Public Fellowships	Check with funding source.

FICA vs. Non-FICA Income

UNC's official titles for postdoc positions as they relate to taxes are described below, based upon the postdoc's funding source. For more information on this policy, see [here](#).

1. **Postdoctoral Fellow/Trainee:** An individual with an earned doctorate, who holds a sponsored postdoctoral fellowship or traineeship, who is engaged in postdoctoral training through research for a fixed period of time, but no more than five years, and receives a stipend or training allowance.
2. **Postdoctoral Research Associate:** An individual with an earned doctorate, who is engaged in postdoctoral training through research for a fixed period of time, but no more than five years, and receives compensation for services performed (wages).

It is important to note that although your appointment letter from CiTEM may designate your position as fellow or trainee and/or describe your compensation as a stipend, these are generic terms used for all CiTEM postdocs rather than official HR designations relating to the definitions described above. Any compensation from funding sources that have salary funds allocated will be paid as salary (subject to FICA taxes), while compensation from funding sources that have stipend allocated will be paid as stipend (not subject to FICA taxes). Any NRSA funds (T32/F32) are considered exempt from FICA taxes, while any non-NRSA funds (including the Golberg fellowship) are subject to FICA taxes. ***This means that postdocs transitioning from primarily T32/F32 funds to primarily Golberg or general grant funding should expect a decrease in take-home pay (even with an increase in total pay with reappointment) due to increased taxes.***

3.5 Benefits

Postdoctoral benefits and policies are described in detail on the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs website, available [here](#). Note that if postdocs are paid from a funding source that is subject to FICA, they are also eligible to enroll in the University's 403(b) or 457(b) supplemental retirement plans. Postdocs exempt from FICA are not eligible for these retirement plans.

3.6 Reappointment Process

Reappointment for postdocs supported by the CiTEM training grant or by Golberg Fellowships occurs yearly. Postdocs should start working with the Director of Postdoctoral Studies for training grant reappointments and the CiTEM Director for Golberg reappointments at least three months before your renewal date. You will need the following information for a reappointment request:

- 1) A summary of research studies (no more than one page)
- 2) A list of any publications resulting from postdoctoral research
- 3) Meetings attended and published abstracts, especially if supported by the training grant
- 4) Seminar and poster presentations
- 5) Postdoctoral fellowship applications submitted and current status
- 6) Names of Postdoctoral Advisory Committee and date(s) of meeting(s)
- 7) Letter from your Postdoctoral Mentor evaluating your progress and agreeing to their continued support (sent directly to CiTEM Director or Director of Postdoctoral Studies)
- 8) A complete IDP form with your Mentor's input

The term limit for UNC postdocs is 5 years. However, appointment extensions beyond 5 years can be requested through the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs. For more information, see [here](#).

3.7 Commute/Parking

Detailed parking information is available on the [UNC Transportation and Parking Website](#). Most postdocs commute to campus using the free [Chapel Hill Transit](#) busses, often in combination with a park and ride pass (much more affordable than an on-campus parking permit). Information about park and ride services can be found [here](#). For on-campus parking, you will need to contact your department's [Parking Coordinator](#) for more information. However, many departments do not allocate parking passes for postdocs. In that case, postdocs are only eligible for parking under the general UNC postdoc allocation in the Craige Deck (CD) or on Bowles Drive (S11), which your department's Parking Coordinator can assist with obtaining for you. *Please note that the CiTEM does not allocate UNC parking passes.*

4. Professional Development Resources

4.1 Groups (Listservs)

The following groups offer helpful resources for postdocs that are often circulated via email. You may automatically receive emails from some of these groups, or you may need to request to be added, depending on the group.

- [UNC Postdoc Association](#)
- [UNC Center for Faculty Excellence](#)
- [UNC Training Initiative in Biomedical and Biological Sciences](#)
- [National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity](#)

4.2 Internship Programs

Office of Technology Commercialization Internship

Postdocs that are interested in learning more about careers in intellectual property and technology commercialization can apply for an internship with UNC's Office of Technology Commercialization (OTC). These unpaid internships typically last the academic school year but are very flexible and easy to work around busy postdoc schedules. For more information, see [here](#).

Office of Postdoctoral Affairs

The Office of Postdoctoral Affairs offers postdoctoral scholars the chance to broaden their skills and experience, while connecting scholars with UNC's Core Facilities through short-term, project-based professional development experiences. Projects typically require 10-20% effort during the duration of the project. Project lengths and commitment time vary but can be up to 3 months. For more information, see [here](#).

4.3 Leadership Opportunities

Leadership opportunities for postdocs include:

- **CiTEM Committees:**
 - [Executive Committee](#): Meets approximately four times per year to discuss CiTEM-related business such as admissions, program improvement, faculty additions, and the retreat. Additional duties may include scoring and evaluating graduate student applications for internal awards and assisting with the organization of student lunches with invited speakers and navigating them on campus.
 - [Invited Speaker Committee](#): Led by CiTEM students and responsible for organizing the visits for invited speakers for CiTEM seminars 1-2 times per year.
- **Society of Toxicology**: All specialty sections, special interest groups, and regional chapters have postdoc representatives, which are elected each fall. There is also an executive committee for the SOT postdoctoral assembly. This is a great way to be introduced to the inner workings of SOT and network beyond UNC.

4.4 Courses and Additional Resources

- [Sanford Burnham Prebys Foundations of Leadership Course](#): 9-month course (September – May, ~4 hours a month) covering core concepts for understanding relationship dynamics and building your leadership style

4.5 Networking

Aside from conferences and events run by local and national academic societies, networking opportunities for postdocs also include:

- CiTEM postdoc database maintained by the Business Services Coordinator (please contact for access and do not share)
- [Triangle Biotech Tuesday](#)
- [Women in Bio - RTP](#)
- [Triangle Area Mass Spectrometry \(TAMS\) Discussion Group](#)
- [Triangle Bioinformatics Group \(TriBix\)](#)
- [LCCC Trainee Day](#)
- [UNC Chromatin and Epigenetics Symposium](#)
- [NC Postdoc Research Symposium](#)

5. Funding Opportunities

5.5 Internal

UNC Leon and Bertha Golberg Postdoctoral Fellowship

Postdocs with no more than 4 years of postdoctoral research experience who are mentored by an investigator affiliated with CiTEM are eligible to apply for the Leon and Bertha Golberg Postdoctoral Fellowship. For more information, see [here](#).

UNC Core Facilities Advocacy Committee Voucher Award

Each fall, the UNC Core Facilities Advocacy Committee solicits applications for voucher awards for use at one of UNC's core facilities. The goal of this program is to fund projects that generate pilot data and establish new collaborations between investigators and cores (i.e., that investigator has not used that core or that technology before). Postdocs are eligible to apply as sole PIs. For more information, see [here](#).

UNC Center for Environmental Health and Susceptibility Grants

The UNC Center for Environmental Health and Susceptibility Pilot Projects Program provides opportunities to acquire research support for pilot studies. Postdocs are eligible to serve as co-PIs on grants with a CEHS faculty member as the other co-PI. For more information, see [here](#).

UNC Lineberger Comprehensive Cancer Center Developmental Awards

The UNC Lineberger Developmental Funding Program (the Innovation Awards) is intended to support the cancer research innovations led by faculty, research staff, fellows and postdocs of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The objective is to stimulate new applications for extramural funding. All UNC Lineberger Comprehensive Cancer Center members and UNC system school faculty are encouraged to apply. Targeted RFAs may be added to each funding cycle, and proposals of high merit in each tier may be considered for the targeted RFA mechanism. For more information, see [here](#).

Other internal fellowships and awards can be found on the OPA website along with help in writing and preparing grant applications. For more information, see [here](#).

5.1 External

NIH Ruth L. Kirschstein Postdoctoral Individual NRSA (F32)

The F32 provides salary support plus a small budget for insurance, travel, and research supplies (institutional allowance). More information can be found on the [NIH F32 parent announcement](#).

NIH Pathway to Independence Award (K99/R00)

The K99 provides salary and research support to postdocs with the goal of facilitating the transition of postdocs to independent, tenure-track faculty positions. Applicants must have no more than four years of postdoctoral research experience at the application due date and must stay in the K99 phase for a minimum of one year to be eligible for the R00 phase. Please note that the National Cancer Institute (NCI) has increased the limit of postdoctoral research experience to six years. Postdoc mentor eligibility varies by funding institute. More information can be found on the [NIH K99/R00 parent announcement](#).

NIH Grants Beyond F32 and K99

Postdocs may be eligible to apply as PI on other types of NIH grants; however, eligibility varies by grant mechanism and funding institute. Reach out to the relevant NIH program officer to verify eligibility before applying.

Postdoc Funding Database

Johns Hopkins maintains an updated postdoc funding opportunities database, available [here](#).

6. Travel Procedures

6.1 General Procedures & Concur

Postdocs are considered staff for the purposes of booking travel and managing reimbursements. Therefore, postdocs must use the UNC [Concur](#) system for submitting travel pre-approval forms, booking flights, and submitting expense reports. These forms are automatically routed through your lab's home department and general UNC systems (generally, *not* through CiTEM) for approval. UNC's travel policies are outlined in detail [here](#), with specific highly relevant sections summarized below. UNC provides resources for learning how to use Concur, which can be found [here](#).

6.2 Travel Requests

Travel requests must be submitted and approved **before** any flights or accommodations can be booked through Concur. Therefore, you should submit travel requests as soon as you know that you plan to attend a conference and have a rough itinerary. Note that expenses on personal credit cards can be incurred prior to Concur approval and be submitted for reimbursement after completion of travel, whereas flights booked through Concur must be linked to an already-approved travel request. For international travel, you should consult your home department because additional forms and authorizations may be required.

Travel Funding

- **All CiTEM postdocs receive \$2,000 per year for training-related travel (conferences, workshops, etc).**
- For travel expenses beyond the \$2,000 per year, postdocs are encouraged to use travel awards to offset costs and should discuss travel plans and expenses with their PI.
- Prior to incurring any expenses for a conference or submitting a travel request, discuss your planned travel and expenses with your PI. As part of the travel request process, you will need to provide a source of funds for your travel, using a Chartfield string. If there are multiple funding sources for your travel, additional Chartfield strings can be provided in the comments section.

Personal Travel

- If personal travel is included before and/or after business travel, this must be approved by your home department and indicated in the travel request. You will need to provide PDFs with a cost comparison showing that flying or transiting on a different day is the same or lower price.
- If the cost of flying on a different day due to personal travel is more, this cost can be allocated such that it will be deducted from your next paycheck following the month where the expense report for the flights is submitted.

AirBnB/VRBO

- If you plan to stay in a vacation rental, a [Non-Hotel Lodging Authorization Request Form](#) must be submitted with your travel request along with a document demonstrating the cost savings compared with a hotel in the same geographic location.

Travel Awards

- If you already know that you will be receiving travel awards that will offset the cost of your travel, you can include these as a negative estimated expense in the “Other” category along with a comment. Otherwise, this can be incorporated into the expense report.

6.3 Booking Flights and Other Reservations

- Flights are booked through Concur using specific parameters for the departure and arrival times. You must select a flight that is within ~\$100 of the lowest cost logical option (Concur will show an error if you try to pick a flight that is too expensive). Frequent flyer programs and known traveler numbers can be entered as part of the flight booking process.
- Other expenses, such as conference registration, are highly encouraged to be purchased through your lab or department’s T&E card so that you don’t need reimbursement.
- Reimbursements are disbursed from the travel team office in the order that they are received and can take up to 3-4 months to process. Postdocs can request a Travel Advance for expenses such as hotel and per diems that are normally reimbursed after travel (which can take 2-3 months). To request an advance, you must submit a help ticket with the Concur Support Desk to set up that access.

7. Conflict Resolution Procedures

Both the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs (OPA) and CiTEM are committed to ensuring a safe and respectful working environment for all trainees. As such, there are plans in place if a conflict must be resolved between a postdoc and their mentor, lab mate, or CiTEM leadership.

If the conflict is primarily between a postdoc and their mentor, the postdoc should consult with the CiTEM Director of Postdoctoral Studies and the CiTEM Program director. If CiTEM leadership intervention is unsuccessful, conflict can be further discussed with the BioSTAR office if the student is in a School of Medicine lab or, for students in labs outside of the School of Medicine, with the groups outlined in the OPA handbook (e.g., OPA office, Ombuds office).

If the conflict is primarily between a postdoc and other lab members or a member of the CiTEM leadership, the postdoc's mentor will be the primary point of contact for recommendations on managing these conflicts.

8. UNC Lingo & Acronyms

CEMALB: Center for Environmental Medicine, Asthma, and Lung Biology

CiTEM: Curriculum in Toxicology and Environmental Medicine

CRI: Children's Research Institute

CEHS: Center for Environmental Health and Susceptibility

MEJ: Mary Ellen Jones Building

TCF: Tissue Culture Procurement Facility located in Lineberger

VPS: Visiting Pulmonary Scholars

HSL: Health Sciences Library

SHC: Student Health Center

SOM: School of Medicine

TIBBS: Training Initiatives in Biomedical and Biological Sciences

OPA: Office of Postdoctoral Affairs

UNC-PDA: University of North Carolina Postdoctoral Association

BIPOC: Black, Indigenous, People of Color

BBPS: Biomedical and Biological Sciences Program

GMB: Genetics Medicine Building (Mason Farm Rd)

NIH: National Institutes of Health

NIEHS: National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences

NC/SOT: North Carolina/Society of Toxicology

21EHS: 21st Century Environmental Health Scholars

"Golberg": Leon and Bertha Golberg Endowment fund that provides support for graduate students and postdocs

“The Beach”: a food court with several options in Burnett-Womack Hall (behind Bondurant)

“Friends”: coffee shop located in the Health Sciences Library

“Saladelia”: coffee shop located in Marsico

“T32”: Training Grant for CiTEM that funds graduate students and postdocs

“F32”: Postdoctoral fellowship that can be applied for

“First-years”: Current first year graduate students rotating in labs

NC TraCS: North Carolina Translational and Clinical Sciences Institute

DGS: Director of Graduate Studies

RTP: Research Triangle Park

Botanical Gardens: UNC Botanical Gardens. Off campus site for retreats, get-togethers and symposiums

RFA: Request for Applications

NCBC: North Carolina Biotechnology Center

TBT: Triangle Biotech Tuesday – not-for-profit networking event for professionals in the Triangle area