



University of South Alabama

Office of Postdoctoral Education

Handbook

2021 – 2022

**Office of Postdoctoral Education
307 North University Blvd., Administration Bldg. 301
Mobile, AL 36688
(251) 460-6310 / fax (251) 460-6575**

<http://www.southalabama.edu/departments/postdoctoraleducation/>

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Welcome to the USA Office of Postdoctoral Education

The University of South Alabama (“USA”) is dedicated to making a difference in the global and local communities through discovery, health and learning. Postdoctoral research is considered essential to achieving that goal and to advancing the scholarly mission of research. Here at USA, our postdoctoral fellows are training and performing research in a variety of disciplines, including cancer/medical research, computing, engineering, marine sciences, pulmonary medicine, pharmacology, psychology, microbiology, chemistry, and biochemistry.

The USA Office of Postdoctoral Education (OPE) was established and announced at the March 12, 2014 Board of Trustees’ meeting. The purpose of the OPE is to provide services and support to all Postdoctoral Fellows throughout the University. The OPE works closely with all academic units and disciplines to address the needs and concerns of postdoctoral fellows.

Postdoctoral Fellows broaden and enhance the University’s research capacity by bringing more talent to the campus. We believe that postdoctoral training should also provide the individual fellows with mentored advanced training to enhance their professional skills and research independence needed to pursue their chosen career path.

Physical Address:

USA Office of Postdoctoral Education
307 North University Blvd., AD301
Mobile, AL 36688

An Overview of the Postdoctoral Experience at USA

All postdoctoral researchers are expected to increase their expertise in a specialist subject, usually in a mentored research and/or scholarly training for the purpose of acquiring professional skills needed to pursue their chosen career path. The OPE believes that postdoctoral students will broaden and enhance the University's research capacity. Additionally, postdoctoral research will help USA achieve its mission of making a difference in the global and local communities through discovery, health and learning.

The purpose of the OPE is to enrich the postdoctoral experience through services and support to both the fellows and the departments. However, the ultimate responsibility for the success of a postdoctoral appointment rests with the Mentors. Faculty Mentors will assist the postdoctoral fellow in developing a research project which will enhance the fellow's knowledge and technical skills, encourage the fellow to present their work and to publish results in a timely fashion, meet regularly with the fellow to discuss research progress and provide regular feedback regarding performance. In addition, Mentors will ensure that the fellow is aware of University policies regarding responsible conduct of research and compliance issues, and other relevant topics.

At the University of South Alabama ("USA"), the postdoctoral research experience emphasizes scholarship and continued research training for individuals who have recently completed a doctoral degree. This policy defines terms and conditions related to postdoctoral appointments at USA. Additionally, postdoctoral appointments are subject to all other applicable USA policies and procedures. The USA Office of Postdoctoral Education is responsible for facilitating appointments, as well as maintaining and updating policies to ensure congruence with mandates from external agencies.

Postdoctoral Fellow

Postdoctoral training is intended to provide individuals who have recently received doctoral degrees (or the equivalent) with a temporary and defined period of mentored advanced training with University faculty ("Mentors"), to enhance their professional skills and research independence needed to pursue their chosen career path. Specific benefits and term limits for Postdoctoral Fellows are outlined below. A Postdoctoral Fellow position is a specific category, and while it is neither a University faculty position nor regular staff employee position, it shares many of the same benefits and policies, as described further herein. For classification and benefits purpose, Postdoctoral Fellows, will be considered either "employees" or "trainees". Trainees are those individuals who have received fellowship funding through external awards such as the NIH Postdoctoral Fellowships (e.g. F-32). Trainees, per federal requirements, may not be classified as employees and the benefits will vary from those postdoctoral fellows classified as employees.

Qualifications

Applicants selected for a position as a Postdoctoral Fellow at USA are required to:

- Hold a recently awarded PhD or equivalent doctoral degree (e.g., MD, DVM, ScD) from an institution of higher learning accredited to the satisfaction of USA;
- Possess sufficient English language proficiency to function in the University environment;
- Satisfy requirements for the postdoctoral position, and provide documentation and application material as requested.

Appointment Information

All postdoctoral appointments and re-appointments are coordinated through the Office of Postdoctoral Education. Records relative to your appointment are maintained in this office. If you later need USA employment verification, inquiries should be directed to this office.

Appointment Process

The following steps must be completed before the postdoctoral fellow is allowed to work:

- Interview of applicant by the mentor **before** making the offer of appointment.
- Send template offer of appointment letter to the applicant delineating the basic terms of the appointment (see below) and explaining that the appointment is contingent upon verification of terminal degree and satisfactory results of the background check. Include background check authorization form in letter with instructions to complete and return.
- Obtain background check
- Appointment of international candidates will also be contingent upon receipt of a J-1 Visa for training at USA.

At a minimum, the template offer of appointment letter should include information regarding:

- Anticipated period of appointment;
- Research program/training objectives;
- Annual compensation;
- Employment benefits;
- Requirement for compliance with University policies, including but not limited to those relating to conduct of research (for more information click [here](#)) ;
- Notice that continuance of Postdoctoral Fellow appointments is contingent upon satisfactory progress and performance, as well as continued availability of funding.

This official offer of appointment letter from a Mentor must be cosigned by the Chair and College Dean (or equivalent officials), and copied to the Office of Postdoctoral Education. A template letter of offer is available [here](#).

Visas

International postdoctoral fellows at the University of South Alabama are sponsored on J-1 visas. The sponsoring department originates a J-1 visa request (DS-2019), coordinated through the Office of Immigration (<https://www.southalabama.edu/departments/immigration/>). An offer for training at the University of South Alabama under the J-1 visa program does not imply any commitment to the fellow for other visa or permanent residency sponsorship.

Duration of Appointment

While the anticipated duration of a postdoctoral appointment is to be stipulated in the letter of offer, it should be understood that continuance of Postdoctoral Fellow appointments is contingent upon satisfactory progress and performance, as well as continued availability of funding. Note that individuals will generally remain as a Postdoctoral Fellow at USA for no longer than a period of four years. However, retention of Fellows for a fifth year may be considered, subject to approval by the relevant Chair and Dean or Director.

Resignation or Termination

Postdoctoral fellows who wish to resign their appointment prior to the end of an appointment period shall notify the Faculty Mentor in writing. It is expected that the Postdoctoral Fellow will provide at least a one-month notice. An appointment may be terminated by the Mentor prior to the end of an appointment period if warranted due to specific and compelling factors, requiring that the Mentor provide at least three months' notice in writing. Circumstances may be deemed to merit immediate termination, including but not limited to cases of fraud or research misconduct. Notices of resignation or termination must be copied to the Office of Postdoctoral Education.

Orientation

International Fellows

All international fellows and students are required to participate in an orientation program prior to beginning at the University. The program provides information concerning:

- services available;
- adjustment to the academic, social, and cultural environment;
- immigration matters;
- local sights and activities;
- health insurance;
- safety and security provisions.

Postdoctoral Orientation

All postdoctoral fellows will be required to attend an orientation by the Office of Postdoctoral Education to review their benefits and sign required paperwork. The orientation will provide information concerning:

- postdoctoral services and support available;
- benefits overview;
- an introduction to the university campus;
- local contact information for getting settled.

In addition, postdoctoral fellows may be required to also attend an orientation in their individual organizational unit.

Compensation and benefits

Minimum compensation levels for Postdoctoral Fellows are commensurate with the postdoctoral entry level (PGY 0) stipends set by the National Institutes of Health at the time of appointment (see current NRSA stipend notice at: <http://grants1.nih.gov/training/nrsa.htm>). Higher compensation levels are available in some situations.

- When a Postdoctoral Fellow successfully obtains extramural support via a training grant, fellowship funding or NIH supplement, the Fellow will receive the award amount specified by the funding agency if it exceeds the minimum compensation level set by the University.
- If compensation provided by an extramural award is less than the University minimum, the difference will be supplied to the Fellow by the Mentor or another source in the University if funds are available (note that, typically, federal research funds cannot be used to supplement NIH training/fellowship stipends).
- Compensation may be incremented annually, if funds are available from the Mentor, another funding source in the University, or extramural awards.

Taxes and Withholding

Depending upon the source of funding for Postdoctoral Fellows, compensation may be subject to federal and state income taxes and FICA taxes. Postdoctoral Fellows whose support derives from Mentor's grants and/or internal funds will have taxes withheld and a Form W-2 filed with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). Postdoctoral Fellows who receive compensation via an extramural training grant or fellowship, where the agency policy identifies that funding as a stipend, will not have taxes withheld. If a Postdoctoral Fellow has funding from both extramural training award and internal funds, the primary funding source will be used to determine withholding and reporting requirements. Regardless, compensation is considered income and may be taxable. Fellows are encouraged to consult the IRS or a tax professional to understand the implications of their compensation status.

Benefits

- USA Health & Dental Plan Insurance – Postdoctoral Fellows are required to have health insurance. The USA Health & Dental Plan provides comprehensive health and dental benefits received within a network of Blue Cross Blue Shield providers. Within the USA Health & Dental Plan is a network of hospitals, physicians, outpatient clinics and other providers affiliated with the University of South Alabama. Their participation in the USA Health & Dental Plan allows members to receive medical care at a lower cost to both the Plan and the member. The cost of the USA Health & Dental Plan Insurance is shared by you and the University.
- Premium Conversion – USA Health & Dental Plan premiums are automatically deducted before any federal, state, or Social Security taxes are withheld. The result is a reduction of taxable income equal to the amount paid for health and dental insurance during the calendar year. Enrollment in Premium Conversion is automatic.
- Flexible Spending Accounts (SouthFlex) – Postdoctoral Fellows can take advantage of flexible spending accounts which are administered by Blue Cross Blue Shield of Alabama. Participants can set aside pre-tax money through payroll deductions to pay for qualified health care expenses, including deductibles, copays, out-of-pocket dental expenses and qualified child care expenses. Money set aside in these accounts will reduce taxable income, providing participants with more value for the dollar. Each plan provides a VISA® reimbursement account card for use when you incur a qualified medical expense. Participants may also submit expenses through the online participant portal for reimbursement. As other eligible expenses are incurred such as dependent care expenses, claims may be filed for reimbursement. The University pays all administrative expenses for this benefit.
- Group Life Insurance – Group Term Life and Accidental Death and Dismemberment insurance benefits are included in the Basic Group Life Insurance Plan. The amount of life insurance for which Postdoctoral Fellows are eligible is determined by base pay. These benefits are provided at no cost to the Postdoctoral Fellow. In addition, the spouse and eligible dependents are each provided with \$5,000 of term life insurance at no cost to the Postdoctoral Fellow.
- Additional Life Insurance – Postdoctoral Fellows may purchase, at their own expense, additional term life in an amount equal to 1, 2, or 3 times the amount provided under the Basic Plan.
- Group Long Term Disability Insurance – The University provides, at no cost to the Postdoctoral Fellow, a Basic Long-Term Disability Plan which provides a 60% income replace benefit in the event of a qualifying disability. Once approved, benefits are payable from the 91st day of disability.
- Travel Insurance - This University paid benefit provides the Postdoctoral Fellow and their eligible dependents with medical, travel, legal, and financial assistance services when faced with an emergency while traveling more than 100 miles away from home.

- University of South Alabama 403(b) Plan and 457(b) Deferred Compensation Plan – Postdoctoral Fellows have the option of participating in supplemental retirement plans through TIAA-CREF which allow investments in fixed and variable annuities and mutual funds. Postdoctoral Fellows may reduce their state and federal taxable income by contributing up to the limit set by Section 402(g) of the IRS Code for each plan.
- Educational Benefit Plan – Upon completion of 6 months of full-time employment prior to the first day of classes, Postdoctoral Fellows may qualify for a tuition credit for up to five credit semester hours, plus the University registration fee for courses taken at the University of South Alabama. A tuition credit of 50% of tuition only with no hour maximum is also available to the spouse and unmarried dependent children (under age 25 on the first day of classes). See <http://www.southalabama.edu/hr> for additional information.
- Employee Assistance Program (EAP) – The EAP offers confidential counseling and referral services at no cost to the Postdoctoral Fellow.
- Time Off – Postdoctoral Fellows are provided with a total of 30 days paid time off annually which will be available for use for vacation days, official holidays, and sick days as needs indicate. 30 days begin on January 1 and are prorated based on start dates throughout the year. There is no accrual of time off from year to year.
- Leave of Absence – Postdoctoral Fellows will be provided leave consistent with the University’s Family Medical Leave (FML) policy, as outlined in the USA Staff Employee Handbook.
- Other benefits - Postdoctoral Fellows will receive a University issued Jagmail account and may purchase a parking hang tag. Postdoctoral Fellows will also have access to University Libraries and may purchase a membership to the Student Recreation Center. Note that benefits described above are provided contingent on the Post-Doctoral Fellow being an employee of USA. Postdoctoral Fellows who receive compensation via an extramural training grant or fellowship **are not USA employees** and will not be provided with the employee benefits. Those not considered employees are labeled as Post-Doctoral Trainees.

BENEFIT	Post-Doctoral Fellows	Post-Doctoral Trainees
USA Health & Dental Plan	YES	Other Insurance*
Premium Conversion	YES	NO
SouthFlex Flexible Spending	YES	NO
University Paid Term Life Insurance	YES	NO
University Paid AD&D Insurance	YES	NO
University Paid Long Term Disability	YES	NO
Additional Term Life	YES	NO
MEDEX Travel Assist	YES	NO
USA Tax Deferred Annuity Plan 403(b)	YES	NO

USA Deferred Comp Plan 457 (b)	YES	NO
Educational Benefit	YES	NO
Employee Assistance Program	YES	NO
Paid Time Off	YES	YES
<p>* Post-Doctoral Trainees are eligible for equivalent health insurance paid by the training grant or may purchase their insurance through UnitedHealthcare Student Resources (UHCSR). For more information, visit http://www.southalabama.edu/departments/studenthealth/insurance.html</p>		

On-the-job Injury Benefits (Employee Handbook 4.1.10)

The University of South Alabama strives to protect its employees from undue financial hardship resulting from qualified job-related injuries or disabilities. In order for the University to assess requests for on-the-job injury (OJI) benefits, the procedures described below must be followed:

If you sustain a serious injury at the worksite during work hours, arrangements will be made for you to be treated at the USA Medical Center Emergency Room. If time is of the essence, based on the severity of the injury, the employee may be taken to the nearest emergency department. If you sustain an injury that is not serious enough to warrant emergency room treatment, and you wish to be considered for OJI benefits by the University, you must report to the hospital health nurse, the house supervisor (after normal business hours), USA Family Practice Center or USA Physicians Group, for treatment.

As a full-time employee, you may receive up to 24 hours paid administrative leave for accidents occurring at the worksite during work hours without affecting your sick leave, vacation or PTO accrual. Part-time employees will be paid administrative leave days at the regular rate of pay for the percentage of eight hours that they normally work.

An Accident/Incident Report must be completed by your supervisor within 72 hours of the worksite accident in order to be considered for OJI benefits. For this reason, a worksite accident should be reported immediately to your supervisor.

If you are covered under the University’s group health insurance program, your medical expenses due to a qualified OJI will be covered up to the limits of the health plan. If you are not covered under the University’s group plan, please contact your supervisor or Human Resources. In this case, you will be billed for any medical services rendered. Medical expenses not covered by group health insurance may be reimbursed by the University, up to a maximum of \$1,000. All claims for lost wages, property damages, and/or medical expenses not paid by the University, medical insurance, or the University’s group health insurance program may be filed by you with the State Board of Adjustment. Approval by the State Board of Adjustment is based upon an investigation of the accident by University officials and a determination by the State Board that the accident qualifies for OJI compensation. Claim forms are available in Human Resources. Claims must be filed with the State Board of Adjustment within one year of the incident date. If you believe expenses related to the incident might be incurred beyond one year from the incident date, and you have not already filed a State Board of Adjustment claim, you should file a claim with the State Board of Adjustment indicating the expenses are “to be determined.” It is not the responsibility of the University to remind you of the one-year time limit for filing a claim with the State Board of Adjustment.

All benefits paid by the University (reinstatement of vacation, sick leave, PTO, or temporary wage replacement payments at 66 2/3% of base salary) will cease no later than 90 days following the date of injury. If your attending physician anticipates a disability of more than 90 calendar days, the waiting period for long-term disability (LTD) benefits, you must make application for LTD benefits based upon such prognosis.

The University will require relevant medical records of injured or disabled parties and may require additional examinations and tests as deemed necessary.

Research Records and Intellectual Property

Research records, including original notebooks, computerized files, and tangible research materials, created by postdoctoral fellows during their appointment are the property of the University of South Alabama, and as such are retained by the University in departure of the individual. Subject to approval of the Mentor, copies of the records may be made and taken by the fellow. Fellows should be familiar with and adhere to the University policy on intellectual property (<https://www.southalabama.edu/departments/research/policies.html#intellectual-property>).

Obligations of Postdoctoral Fellows

During this period of research training, Postdoctoral Fellows are obligated to conscientiously perform research and scholarly work, maintain adequate research records, and conform to standards for responsible conduct of research set out by the University. Postdoctoral Fellows must construct and annually update an Individual Development Plan, in collaboration with their Faculty Mentor. In addition, Postdoctoral Fellows must complete compliance training as required by USA in a timely fashion and observe applicable university, local, state, and federal guidelines, rules, policies, and laws.

Obligations of Faculty Mentors

Faculty Mentors will assist the Postdoctoral Fellow in developing a research project which will enhance the Postdoctoral Fellow's knowledge and technical skills, encourage the Postdoctoral Fellow to present his/her work and to publish results in a timely fashion, meet regularly with the Postdoctoral Fellow to discuss research progress, and provide regular constructive feedback regarding performance. Further, Mentors will work with the Postdoctoral Fellows to develop and maintain an Individual Development Plan and should reasonably allow the Postdoctoral Fellow time to participate in available University career development opportunities. Mentors will ensure that the Postdoctoral Fellow is aware of University policies regarding responsible conduct of research and compliance issues in addition to other relevant topics.

Annual Evaluations

Mentors will provide Postdoctoral Fellows with a written evaluation of progress and performance annually. The evaluation must be discussed with and signed by the Postdoctoral Fellow, acknowledging his/her receipt of the evaluation. A copy of the evaluation must be forwarded to the Office of Postdoctoral Education.

Grievances/Conflict Resolution

When possible, Postdoctoral Fellows should seek to resolve conflicts informally via discussions with Mentors, Department Chairs, other senior administrators, or the Office of Postdoctoral Education. Personnel in the Office of Postdoctoral Education are available to act as mediators for such informal discussions. When issues cannot be informally resolved, the following procedures are available:

Academic Issues: For unresolved academic issues (e.g., workload, authorship concerns, termination), the Postdoctoral Fellow may file a formal grievance with the Office of Postdoctoral Education (OPE). Postdoctoral Fellows acting in good faith may do so without fear of penalty or reprisal.

- The Postdoctoral Fellow should file a written statement of grievance with the OPE within 30 days of the last meeting attempting an informal resolution as described above. The statement must set out a concise statement of the allegation, the facts/evidence supporting the complaint, a suggested outcome for resolution, and a list of individuals consulted for informal resolution.
- The OPE will solicit a response from the individual about which the complaint filed ("Respondent") within 5 business days.
- The OPE will then identify the grievance committee ("Committee") of 2 Faculty and 1 Postdoctoral Fellow. The Committee will be composed of individuals not involved in the conflict.
- Within 15 business days of Committee appointment, the Committee will meet to review the grievance, including evidence and testimony from the Postdoctoral Fellow bringing the complaint, the Respondent, and the witnesses as requested and/or allowed by the Committee.
- In closed session, the Committee shall decide, based on the preponderance of evidence, to accept or deny the grievance. If the grievance is accepted, the Committee shall make a recommendation for resolution. A summary of the grievance, process, and outcomes (not to include the deliberations of the Committee) shall be forwarded to the OPE. The OPE will notify all parties as to the outcome of the grievance process.
- Appeals must be directed to the Office of Postdoctoral Education within 5 business days of the notification of the outcome and may only address issues of procedural error. The decision by the Dean of the Graduate School or Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs on the appeal will be final and all parties will be notified.

For other issues that cannot be resolved informally (see below), Postdoctoral Fellows should pursue relevant University grievance procedures.

Research Misconduct: Allegations of research misconduct should be pursued through the USA Office of Research Compliance and Assurance. Policies and information regarding the Whistleblower Hotline are available at <http://www.southalabama.edu/researchcompliance/standards.html> or by dialing 1-844-666-3599.

Title IX Issues: To address/report workplace issues of sexual harassment/violence or sexual discrimination, Postdoctoral Fellows should contact the Faculty Title IX coordinator:

Paula Buerger, Manager EEO

TRP Building III Suite 2200

(251) 460-6641

pbuerger@southalabama.edu<https://secure.ethicspoint.com/domain/media/en/gui/60474/>

Other Workplace Issues: To address/report other workplace issues of harassment or discrimination which are not of a sexual nature, Postdoctoral Fellows should contact USA Human Resources. While the Postdoctoral Fellow may choose to consult a lawyer regarding grievance/conflict and a lawyer may be present to hear testimony and observe, lawyers will not be allowed to otherwise participate in either the informal process or the formal process of the University.

Postdoctoral Fellows Association

USA Postdoctoral Fellows may consider joining the National Postdoctoral Association (<http://www.nationalpostdoc.org/>). The association provides career development, programmatic support, research collaboration, and social opportunities for Fellows.

Responsible Conduct of Research Training

All federal funding agencies require that postdoctoral fellows receive training in Responsible Conduct of Research. The National Institutes of Health further require face-to-face training in this area. If this type of training is not otherwise available, postdoctoral fellows will be required to sign up for a course on Responsible Conduct of Research (GIS-501), offered during the fall semester every Tuesday from 3:30 to 5:00 PM.

Getting Started Locally

There are many resources available to new postdoctoral fellows at the University of South Alabama to help with the transition into a new community and research environment. These resources include the mentor, fellow lab members, departmental administrators, International Student Services, and the Office of Postdoctoral Education. All of these resources are here to support you, so please make use of as many as needed to help ease your transition.

Additional information is available from the following websites:

<https://www.southalabama.edu/colleges/graduateschool/>

<https://www.southalabama.edu/departments/immigration/lifeinmobile.html>

Getting Settled Locally

Alabama Driver's License

First Time Living in the State:

Alabama Department of Public Safety

3400 Demetropolis Rd.

Mobile, AL 36693

(251) 660-2330

<https://dps.alabama.gov>

Returning to the State or Renewals:

Mobile County License Commissioner

3925 Michael Blvd.

Mobile, AL 36609

(251) 574-8551

www.mobilecountylc.com

Please note that this is the primary location. Check the License Commissioner's website for additional locations and hours. All License offices are closed on Wednesday.

Social Security Office

550 Government St., Suite 100

Mobile, AL 36602

(866) 593-1922

www.ssa.gov/pgm/reach.htm

Voter Registration

Mobile County Board of Registrars

151 Government St., Suite 165

Mobile, AL 36602

(251) 574-8586

www.mobilecountyal.gov/government/voting.html

Rental Housing Information (Houses and Apartments)

For a list of current homes and apartments for rent, the following website lists the information available in the local newspaper, the Mobile Register. It will also give you names of property management companies that may be able to help you narrow your search. Mentors and fellow lab members would also be a great resource for this purpose.

<http://realestate.al.com/Alabama/mobile-county/mobile/for-rent>

Directory

Harold Pardue, PhD Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of the Graduate School, (251) 460-6310

Lynne Chronister, M.P.A., Vice President for Research and Economic Development, (251) 460-6333

lchronister@southalabama.edu

Nicole Schultz, Director of the Office of Faculty and Postdoctoral Affairs, College of Medicine (251) 460-7151

nschultz@southalabama.edu

Office of Immigration

(251) 460-6050

Denise Robb, Director of the Office of Immigration

drobb@southalabama.edu

immigration@southalabama.edu

Important Websites

Office of Postdoctoral Education –

<http://www.southalabama.edu/departments/postdoctoraleducation/>

Office of the President for Research and Economic Development –

www.southalabama.edu/vpresearch/

USA College of Medicine Postdoctoral –

www.usahealthsystem.com/postdoctoral-fellows

USA Regulatory Compliance for Research –

www.southalabama.edu/researchcompliance/

Internal Revenue Service Policy on Taxability of Fellowship Stipends –
www.irs.gov/publications/p970/index.html

National Postdoctoral Association – www.nationalpostdoc.org

Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology Career Center –
http://careers.faseb.org/home/index.cfm?site_id=521

Science Careers from the Journal *Science* –
<http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org>

National Institute of Health (NIH) Career Resources –
<http://grants.nih.gov/training/resources.htm>