

# **GUIDELINES FOR SDSU RESEARCH FOUNDATION RESEARCH CLASSIFICATIONS**

## **Introduction**

The purpose of these guidelines is to standardize the classifications and benefits of the following research positions: master's level graduate research assistants, doctoral students and post-doctoral fellows. These are academic, training positions and as such, the qualifications for these positions are established by San Diego State University (SDSU). These guidelines also define the Research Scientist and Visiting Scholar classifications.

These guidelines only apply to positions funded and administered through San Diego State University Research Foundation (SDSURF)—usually through grants and contracts. All positions are subject to the availability of funding and are at-will, work-for-hire, paid for performance, positions. These guidelines do not apply to the payment of scholarships/stipends. The differences between work-for-hire and scholarships/stipends are explained in the last section of these guidelines.

These guidelines do not address other research positions, for example: lab manager or research technician.

**For current employees in the covered positions:** If current employees are out of compliance with the standards proscribed in these guidelines, SDSURF's Human Resources (HR) department will work with the employee's supervisor to develop a plan to transition to the new standards. It should be noted that current employees with a specific benefit, such as retirement contribution, will not be removed from the retirement plan as part of the transition. If a current employee does not have a particular benefit that is offered by this new series, that employee will be transitioned to add the benefit. This distinction is necessary to remain compliant with laws related to benefits administration.

**Initial Implementation Date:** July 1, 2012.

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**GRADUATE RESEARCH ASSISTANT (GRA)** is an academic appointment intended to cover student employees who are currently enrolled in a master's level graduate program at SDSU and are working in a field of study to gain practical experience that contributes toward their graduate degree. The appointment to the position of Graduate Research Assistant is made by SDSU through the appropriate academic process. The GRA is selected by SDSU faculty in their respective graduate programs and must meet the requirements of the position established by the applicable SDSU college and department.

**Duration of employment** for this position will be dependent upon funding and the student continuing to meet the GRA requirements established by SDSU as well as the expectations of the position that are established by the applicable SDSU college or department. Additionally, failure to meet satisfactory performance, including compliance with SDSU Research Foundation policies, may result in termination of this appointment. Annual renewal of academic appointments will not be required but confirmation of position extension is required.

**Minimum qualifications** for the Graduate Research Assistant are established by SDSU as specified in the requirements for Graduate Assistant/Teaching Assistant appointments.

**Salary** for the Graduate Research Assistant is an hourly pay rate subject to overtime compensation in accordance with federal and state pay requirements for non-exempt employees. The pay rate is dependent upon qualifications and may vary by academic discipline, area of study, or research. This position is a half-time appointment, paid hourly for hours worked not to exceed 20 hours per week. To effectively and legally track hours worked, these student employees will be required to submit timesheets to payroll that accurately reflect daily hours worked.

**Hourly Pay Rate** ranges from \$10.50-\$30.00.

**Benefits:** Graduate Research Assistants are exempt from FICA contributions (TS-Temporary Student) and receive no other employer provided benefits. GRA's do receive sick pay accruals but are not eligible for vacation or holiday pay, life or accidental death insurance, or retirement benefits. Graduate Research Assistants may contribute their own funds to a voluntary tax sheltered annuity but there is no matching contribution by SDSURF.

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**JOINT DOCTORAL PROGRAM STUDENT (JDP)** classification is an overtime exempt, academic appointment made by SDSU and is intended for student employees currently enrolled in an SDSU joint doctoral program. The student in this position will perform a variety of guided research on funded projects or programs which are directed closely by university faculty. The work performed is for the primary benefit of the sponsor, who is funding the research project. This is not a student stipend or scholarship which is defined as being for the primary benefit of the student to aid in the pursuit of his/her studies.

**Duration of employment** for this position is dependent upon funding and the student's continued enrollment in an SDSU joint doctoral program and satisfactory progress (as determined by the student's academic department) toward the completion of the Ph.D. Additionally, failure to meet satisfactory performance, including compliance with SDSU Research Foundation policies, may result in termination of this appointment. Annual renewal of appointments will not be required but confirmation of position extension is required.

**Minimum Qualifications** for the JDP positions are established by SDSU. All JDP employees must be currently enrolled and in good standing in a joint doctoral program at SDSU.

**Salary** is based on the salary guidelines of the NIH. The pay rate is dependent upon qualifications and may vary by academic discipline, area of study, or research. The maximum pay rate will be adjusted periodically to be competitive with the National Institutes for Health (NIH) stipend guidelines for doctoral students. The salary schedule is consistent with an overtime exempt salary position (consistent with the IWC Opinion 1994 WL 1004845 and Wage and Hour Division Field Operations Handbook, Volume II, paragraph 10b18). This position is a benefit eligible appointment, and is intended to be 75% FTE (30 hours per week). Assignments exceeding 30 hours per week must be approved by the JDP program director.

**Annualized Salary** ranges from \$23,376 to \$43,690. JDP student salaries are determined by the individual JDP program and should be consistent for all students within the program with similar qualifications and experience.

**Benefits** for the JDP position will include employee-only medical, dental and vision coverage through the least expensive plan offered by SDSURF and participation in the employee assistance plan. Coverage for eligible dependents will be offered but paid by the student employee, if elected. The JDP position does receive sick pay accruals, but no other benefits will be offered to these student employees. Consequently, they will not be eligible for vacation or holiday pay, life or accidental death insurance, or retirement benefits. However, they will be eligible to contribute their own funds to a voluntary tax sheltered annuity but there will be no matching contribution made by SDSURF.

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**POSTDOCTORAL RESEARCH FELLOW** is an academic appointment made by SDSU. The position is an overtime exempt classification intended to cover the employee with a doctoral degree or equivalent who is employed for a defined period of mentored advanced training to enhance professional skills and research independence in the fellow's academic discipline. This position is not intended to be part of a clinical training program. The postdoctoral research fellow works under the supervision of an SDSU faculty member.

**Duration of employment:** The fellowship is for a specified period of time that is defined when the position is created. It is also contingent on the continuation of funding. Additionally, failure to meet satisfactory performance, including compliance with SDSU Research Foundation policies, may result in termination of this appointment.

**Minimum qualifications:** a doctoral degree or equivalent in an appropriate field.

**Salary** for the Postdoctoral Research Fellow is based on the salary guidelines of the NIH. It may be adjusted to reflect differences in disciplines or unique qualifications and/or experiences of the applicant. The following salary schedule is consistent with an overtime exempt salary plan:

**Annualized Salary Schedule for Postdoctoral Research Fellow:**

Less than 3 years of experience:	\$43,692—\$47,268
3 to 5 years of experience:	\$49,152—\$53,160
More than 5 years of experience	\$55,296—\$78,120

**Benefits** for a full-time Postdoctoral Research Fellow who qualifies for participation in the benefits programs will include medical, dental and vision coverage through SDSURF's lowest cost provider and participation in the employee assistance plan. Coverage for eligible dependents will be offered but paid by the employee, if elected. The Postdoctoral Research position does receive sick pay accruals, but no other benefits will be offered to these employees. Consequently, they will not be eligible for vacation or holiday pay or life and accidental death insurance. However, they will be eligible to contribute their own funds to a voluntary tax sheltered annuity, but there will be no matching contributions paid by SDSURF.

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**RESEARCH SCIENTIST** is an overtime exempt classification intended to provide a career path for experienced researchers who have attained a doctoral or equivalent degree. The Research Scientist will have experience sufficient to enable the employee to conduct all manner of research with minimal or general guidance by the principal investigator. The Research Scientist independently conducts complex scientific research or scholarship. Research scientists are expected to work independently, generate grant funding for projects and publish research results. The Research Scientist may be a principal investigator on grants if he/she holds an SDSU adjunct faculty appointment and meets any additional requirements of his/her academic department.

**Duration of employment** is indefinite and dependent upon performance and funding, including but not limited to compliance with SDSU Research Foundation policies.

**Minimum qualifications** for this position include a doctoral or equivalent degree and a minimum of two (2) years of postdoctoral research. Additional requirements may be developed for particular academic disciplines.

**Salary** for the Research Scientist is based on the schedule below. These are general guidelines and may be adjusted for differences in disciplines. The initial placement in the Research Scientist schedule is based on a combination of factors of which years of post-doctoral experience is only one. Others factors include research qualifications and accomplishments, professional activities and professional competence. These criteria should be roughly equivalent

to the research criteria used by SDSU in the appointment or promotion of its academic, tenured track faculty (in similar disciplines). Personnel actions leading to pay increases or promotions for this classification of position are recommended by the Research Scientist's supervisor and reviewed and approved by the appropriate department or college academic officer at SDSU. SDSURF will consult with the respective college to determine the appropriate academic review and approval for hiring and promotion of the Research Scientist.

**Annualized Salary Schedule for Research Scientist:**

Research Scientist 1	\$48,444—\$65,124 (qualifications generally equivalent to Instructor position in the particular discipline at SDSU)
Research Scientist 2	\$58,044— \$129,360 (qualifications generally equivalent to Assistant Professor)
Research Scientist 3	\$66,588—\$142,008 (qualifications generally equivalent to Associate Professor)
Research Scientist 4	\$84,048—NIH salary cap (qualifications generally equivalent to Professor)

**Benefits** for a full-time Research Scientist who qualifies for participation in the benefits programs will include medical, dental and vision coverage, retirement plan participation and all other benefits consistent with regular full-time employment. Additionally, this employee will accrue vacation, sick and personal holiday time, life insurance and accidental death.

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**VISITING SCHOLAR** classification is under review but the basic guidelines include the following:

1. These scholars generally come from another institution specifically to train or collaborate with a SDSU faculty member.
2. These scholars are not considered “work for hire” employees.
3. The compensation is generally a “living allowance” either as salary or stipend from their home country, educational institution or employer. Benefits may be provided to the scholar at their cost. No employer paid benefits will be offered. Each circumstance may vary and will be individually negotiated through SDSURF and approved by the appropriate academic unit prior to hire.

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**SCHOLARSHIPS/FELLOWSHIPS**—collectively referred to as scholarships—are included in these guidelines to contrast them from the various positions described above. Scholarship payments

are sometimes referred to as stipends. The fundamental difference between scholarships and the other positions in this document is that a scholarship is generally an amount paid for the benefit of the student at an educational institution to aid in the pursuit of his/her studies. Payments made for the other positions described in these guidelines are pay for performance. It is pay received by the individual in exchange for services provided that benefits the employer. Normally, scholarships are paid through the financial aid office at SDSU. However, there are rare occasions where scholarships are paid directly by SDSURF.