

BSD PATHWAYS TO INDEPENDENCE PROGRAM

[Following pages are official language of record for the Provost's Office. Here is a summary for the BSD:]

BSD departments can appoint as Instructor both basic scientists and physician-scientists who are expected to progress to faculty positions.

Eligibility guidelines:

- PhDs: (a) Three years of postdoctoral training; (b) A first-authored work based on postdoctoral research accepted for publication in a significant scholarly journal; (c) Having originated a research project they may own when independent; (d) Commitment from prospective sponsor/mentor. [That is, this is not intended to accommodate every postdoctoral researcher whose eligibility lapses.]
- MDs with limited research training: (a) Completion of clinical training; (b) Commitment from prospective sponsor/mentor/unit
- Could be either our own trainees or trainees from other institutions

Application and selection:

- Applicants will apply to a posting/national advertisement of the BSD [i.e., no departmental search required]. The application will be the text of a K award application, actual or prospective. At first, we will need to empanel a BSD committee to assure that the applicants are genuinely en route to a faculty position.
- Aspiration is to accommodate as many individuals as can benefit from the program and we have the ability to support. That is, it is OK to prepare scholars to obtain faculty positions elsewhere.

Appointment:

- As **Instructor** (which would reduce confusion in NIH review of grant applications)
- This rank provides automatic PI eligibility
- Requires faculty vote, Dean's endorsement, and Provost's approval.
- Up to 4 years total; could be less
- Cannot** be promoted to assistant professor. But can apply for a vacant assistant professorship and be appointed if the successful applicant in a national search.

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Objective: To enhance the stature of the BSD as a trainer of faculty by bringing individuals who have completed postdoctoral training to the point where they are able to conduct their research independently and are competitive for major grant supportⁱ and assistant professorships. In the current competitive environment, this point is often unattainable during the postdoctoral period.

Eligibility: By the start of the appointment, the appointee must have a doctoral degree and have completed a research or clinical postdoctoral training program. Appointments are for individuals who will move into faculty positions, and not for research associates or staff scientists or a “jobs program” for current trainees. Minimum qualifications *for application* may vary; e.g.:

- PhDs with research postdoctoral training: (a) Three years of postdoctoral training; (b) A first-authored work based on postdoctoral research accepted for publication in a significant scholarly journal; (c) Having originated a research project they may own when independent; (d) Commitmentⁱⁱ from prospective sponsor/mentor, also attesting to (c).

- MDs with limited research training: (a) Completion of clinical training; (b) Commitment from prospective sponsor/mentor/unitⁱⁱⁱ

Application and selection: Applicants will apply to a posting/national advertisement of the BSD^{iv}. At least quarterly, a committee of BSD faculty from outside the prospective sponsoring department/section will review the applicant pool and recommend appointments to the Dean. At this career stage, discrete accomplishments are often insufficient to distinguish between those on the path to assistant professorships and those with other trajectories. For this reason, the mentor(s) and departmental commitment statements will often be the primary basis for selection. Reviewers will assess for PhD applicants, for example:

- a) Authoritativeness of the assessment of the proposed research; is it reasonable or far-fetched?
- b) Confidence that the mentee will proceed to independence, and its rationale
- c) The proposed investment in the mentee’s success
- d) The assurance that the mentee can take on ownership of the project when the mentee leaves the lab
- e) Realism of the proposed timeline (courses, mentoring meetings)

Much of these is in a normal NIH K award application. For MD applicants, who may have not yet formulated a research plan, elements a) and d) may be premature. The selection committee will also consider prior success of prospective mentors and departments in achieving the program’s goals. The number selected will be a joint function of the applicant’s, department’s/section’s, and Division’s capacity to support the expected career development. That is, the program will search for all those who will most benefit from the program’s goals rather than in relation to the present faculty needs of BSD departments.

Appointment terms and conditions: Successful applicants would be recommended for appointment as University employees at the rank of Instructor under Statute 11.2, the same

Statute under which SOM appointments are made. Terms would be for 1 year, with the potential for reappointments not to exceed 4 years in total. Each appointment would require a vote of the department/section faculty, and proceed to the Dean and the Provost for approval. Reappointment would be contingent on adequate progress towards independence. In addition, reappointment for the second year normally would require an active K award or the equivalent for PhDs, and a pending K award (or equivalent) application for an MD.

For those with clinical privileges, clinical obligations up to 20% effort are permissible.

Although formal educational duties up to 20% effort (less clinical obligations) are permissible, in most cases educational activity will be informal; e.g., of co-workers and trainees in the research setting.

Obligations: Application requires a stated commitment to the applicant's research career development, including^v:

- a primary mentor who, together with the candidate, is responsible for the planning, directing, monitoring, and executing the program. The candidate may also nominate co-mentors as appropriate to the goals of the program.
- The mentor should be recognized as an accomplished investigator in the proposed research area and have a track record of success in training and placing independent investigators.
- The mentor should have sufficient independent research
- A statement from the mentor providing: 1) information on his/her research qualifications and previous experience as a research supervisor; 2) a plan that describes the nature of the supervision and mentoring that will occur during the proposed award period; 3) a plan for career progression for the candidate to move from the mentored stage of his/her career to independent research investigator status during the project period of the award; and 4) a plan for monitoring the candidate's research, publications, and progression towards independence.
- Similar information must be provided by any co-mentor. If more than one co-mentor is proposed, the respective areas of expertise and responsibility of each should be described. Co-mentors should clearly describe how they will coordinate the mentoring of the candidate. If any of the co-mentors are not located at the sponsoring institution, a statement should be provided describing the mechanism(s) and frequency of communication with the candidate, including the frequency of personal meetings.
- The mentor must agree to provide annual evaluations of the candidate's progress as required in the annual progress report.
- The sponsoring department must document a strong, well-established research and career development program related to the candidate's area of interest, including a high-quality research environment with key faculty members and other investigators capable of productive collaboration with the candidate.
- The sponsoring department must agree to provide the candidate with appropriate office and laboratory space, equipment, and other resources and facilities (including access to clinical and/or other research populations) to carry out the proposed research plan.
- The sponsoring department must agree to provide appropriate time and support for any proposed mentor(s) and/or other staff consistent with the career development plan.

The appointment letter must clearly state: "Those appointed as Instructor in the Pathways to Independence program can achieve the rank of assistant professor at the University of Chicago only through successful competition in a national search to fill an open position. Appointment as Instructor in the Pathways to Independence program carries no implication that such a search will eventuate."

The department of appointment (and its chair) is responsible for oversight of the mentor(s) and execution of the career development plan proposed in the application. The department may

set reasonable conditions for reappointment (e.g., submission and/or funding of a K application, production of a peer-reviewed publication) if sufficiently in advance to allow for their satisfaction.

Funding: The majority of the funding would be via individual or institutional NIH K awards (Career Development Awards). Similar awards are also available from other government agencies and the private sector. Some support would come from grant/contract funding of individual faculty and faculty groups, who might choose to allocate funds for this purpose subject to award conditions. Some could come from section, department, Divisional, and/or University funds via the normal budget process. In any event, the expectation is that most K awardees will require supplemental funding.

Review: This program should undergo review after 5 years, at which point it should be continued, modified, or discontinued.

ⁱ From <https://www.nichd.nih.gov/training/extramural/faqs/Pages/faqs-resources.aspx>

ⁱⁱ Commitment implies a considerable investment of time, facilities, and financial support, and is contingent on a match between the research interests of the prospective sponsor and those of the applicant. It is the responsibility of applicants to identify and approach prospective sponsors, and to convince the prospective sponsor to commit if the application is approved. A list of BSD faculty is at <https://bsdacademicaffairs.uchicago.edu/page/faculty-department>

ⁱⁱⁱ Some departments, sections, centers or institutes may offer programs in which a sponsor is identified and a research plan developed during the initial year.

^{iv} e.g., **BSD Career Development Appointments**. Applications are welcome from outstanding PhDs and/or MDs who will have completed postdoctoral or fellowship training at the time of appointment for a program of mentored research that will develop competitiveness for major grant support and assistant professorships. Quarterly the BSD will review applicants' (a) background, career goals and objectives, plan for career development/training activities during the award period; (b) plans and statements of the proposed mentor and co-mentor(s); and (c) departmental commitment to the applicant's research career development; and if feasible (d) research plan. [These are components of a typical NIH K award application, which may be provided.] Successful applicants may be offered appointment as Instructor, a faculty rank limited to no more than 4 years total. Prospective applicants are urged to approach appropriate BSD faculty (<https://bsdacademicaffairs.uchicago.edu/page/faculty-department>) in advance of applying. To apply, submit a current curriculum vitae, names of prospective sponsors on the BSD faculty if known, and a statement of past, current, and proposed research to: #####. Applicants must also contact the prospective sponsors and request that a statement of commitment be submitted to the selection committee.

^v From <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/pa-files/PA-11-190.html>