

FELLOWSHIP TIME, SCHEDULES, and ABSENCES POLICY FOR NON-FTE FELLOWS

Pursuant to our agreement with the NIH Fellows United, we are issuing the following guidance regarding fellowship time, schedules, protected time for professional development activities, and absences. The following policies apply to all IRTAs, CRTAs, and Visiting Fellows appointed as postbaccalaureate, predoctoral, or postdoctoral fellows. The policy also applies to Masters (MS) students appointed to full-time appointments in the NIH Academic Internship Program (AIP). These groups will be collectively referred to as “fellows” throughout this document. **Policies outlined here do not apply to Research or Clinical Fellows on a Title 42(g) appointment.**

IMPORTANT DEFINITIONS

1. **Fellowship time** is the sum of research time and professional development time as defined below.
 - a. **Research time** includes, but is not limited to, time spent on research planning, performing experiments, data analysis, reading and preparing manuscripts, preparing and delivering presentations, attending group meetings or journal clubs, participating in trainings, seminars, and/or conferences specifically related to the research group, and NIH-wide seminars such as the Wednesday Afternoon Lecture Series (WALS). These will be collectively referred to as “fellowship activities” in the remainder of this document.
 - b. **Professional development time** includes, but is not limited to, workshops and courses unrelated to the fellow’s research responsibilities, preparation of job or school applications, preparation for graduate/professional school examinations, informational interviews, interviews for new positions, career and professional development workshops, shadowing on or off campus, and classes (through the Foundation for Advanced Education in the Science (FAES) or otherwise) that are unrelated to the research being performed.
2. **Fellowship schedule** is the weekly schedule when a fellow is typically expected to be engaged in fellowship activities; a fellowship schedule may include time on campus, at an approved off-campus location, or from an approved telework location.
3. **Excused Absence With Stipend (AWS)** is time away from the research group to tend to personal needs, illness, or other activities without deductions from monthly stipends. This will be referred to as “leave” in the remainder of this document.
4. **Excused Absence Without Stipend (AWOS)** is time away from the research group to tend to personal needs, illness, or other activities with deductions taken from monthly stipends.
5. **Designated Agency Official (DAO)** will generally be the Principal Investigator (PI) or research group leader. The DAO is responsible for tracking and approving fellowship schedules, leave, and professional development time. The DAO must be an NIH full-time equivalent (FTE) employee, but not a Clinical or Research Fellow, as they are members of the NIH Fellows United bargaining unit.

FELLOWSHIP SCHEDULES

1. Weekly fellowship schedules are ~40 hours. While most fellowship time will focus on research-related responsibilities, fellows are encouraged to engage in professional development activities and are provided with ~10% protected time as part of their fellowship schedules for these activities.

2. Fellowship time includes periods of time taken for eating and personal breaks, as needed. This time will not be tracked separately but may be monitored by the DAO if concerns arise.
3. Fellows and their DAOs should establish a schedule that supports the needs of the research group while helping the fellow achieve their broader personal, career, and educational goals.
 - a. Most fellowship activities will take place Monday through Friday, generally between the hours of 7:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m. However, scientific needs may dictate a different schedule, including early morning, evening, and/or weekend work. This is permissible, but only if agreeable to the fellow AND approved or directed in advance by the DAO. DAO approval will be based on prior performance, ability to work independently, research needs, and safety considerations.
 - b. Fellowship schedules are flexible and may vary week-to-week but only if discussed and approved by both parties. DAOs are not required to approve weekend fellowship schedules in lieu of weekday attendance but this is allowable when appropriate.
 - c. Requests to modify fellowship schedules should be made in advance as soon as practicable in writing, no less than 24 hours in advance. Responses must be provided within 24 hours.
 - d. If an emergency or change in experimental plans dictates an immediate change in schedule, either the DAO or the fellow should be notified in writing as soon as possible.
4. Nothing precludes a fellow from voluntarily choosing to engage in fellowship activities more than 40 hours per week; however, DAOs must not expect or mandate additional research time beyond 40 hours per week. DAOs also may not schedule meetings on days when the government is closed, on weekends, or outside typical business hours.
5. When research time exceeds 40 hours in a week, the DAO and fellow may mutually agree to additional flexibilities.
6. Fellows with concerns regarding fellowship schedules may discuss them directly with the DAO or may reach out to osite-private@nih.gov for guidance.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TIME

1. Fellows are provided with ~4 hours of protected time each week to engage in appropriate professional development activities of their choosing.
2. Given the need for flexibility, professional development time will be tracked in increments of ~16 hours monthly. Professional development time does not accrue or rollover month-to-month.
3. Professional development time may be used to participate in workshops and courses unrelated to the fellow's research, preparation of job or school applications, preparation for graduate/professional school exams, informational interviews, interviews for new positions, professional development training, well-being advising, shadowing on or off campus, and classes unrelated to the NIH research.
 - a. Some activities listed above, such as interviews, shadowing, or study time, may exceed monthly limits as determined by the DAO. In those situations, fellows may request leave to participate in the activity, following the leave policy below.
 - b. Seminars relevant to the research group, WALs, and other Institute or Center (IC) or NIH-wide seminars, journal clubs, and scientific retreats are not considered professional development activities, as they are more appropriately considered regular activities as part of a successful fellowship experience at the NIH.
 - c. Fellows do not need to take leave or professional development time for late afternoon or evening courses if they fall outside of the fellow's approved schedule.

4. In the event a fellow exceeds their professional development time, the DAO and the fellow may mutually agree to a modification in the fellowship schedule, or the fellow may request leave. Nothing precludes a DAO from offering additional monthly professional development time, but this is not required.
5. Fellows must submit requests to participate in professional development activities in writing, via email, to the DAO.
 - a. The request must include the date(s) and time(s) and the total amount of time requested, in hours. The request should briefly describe the activity (e.g., career/educational meeting, OITE or IC training, shadowing, library course, etc.). For privacy purposes, fellows should not be asked to provide details regarding the purposes of meetings with OITE or IC training office staff.
 - b. Upon review, the DAO will approve or deny the request. Denials may occur if the activity requested directly interferes with research expectations or other required fellowship activities.
 - c. Failure of the DAO to respond to a request for protected professional development time will be considered approval of the request.

ABSENCE WITH/WITHOUT STIPEND

1. Fellows are excused from fellowship activities on all Federal holidays and any time the government is closed.
 - a. If there is a critical research need that prevents a fellow from observing a designated federal holiday, the DAO will allow the fellow to select another date to be excused from fellowship activities in lieu of the holiday. The agreement between the DAO and fellow must be documented in an email in advance of the holiday.
2. Fellows are provided with up to thirty (30) days of leave per award year for a full-year appointment. The balance is set on their initial award start date, and resets annually on the renewal date if the fellow receives an award renewal for a full-year appointment.
 - a. If an award renewal is for a period less than one (1) year, leave balances will be prorated based on the duration of the renewal and noted clearly in the renewal letter. The prorated leave balance is provided in full at the start of the short-term renewal.
 - b. Leave balances do not accrue or rollover year-to-year. Unused leave has no monetary value.
3. Fellows are expected to use leave for vacations, medical needs, emergencies, illness, care of a family member, bereavement, and immigration matters.
 - a. Fellows may also use leave for extended graduate/professional exam study time, shadowing, volunteer opportunities, and interviews, when professional development time has been exhausted.
 - b. Fellows remain in AWS status without using their leave allocation for jury duty, six (6) weeks of military duty, parental leave (see below), or while on official government travel.
 - c. If the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) places Federal employees on situational telework due to a weather-related or other emergency, fellows must take leave if they are unable or unwilling to telework.
4. For non-emergency leave, fellows must submit requests to use leave to the DAO as far in advance as feasible, but generally no later than twenty-four (24) hours in advance. All requests should be directed to the DAO via email.
 - a. The request must include the date(s) and amount of time requested. Fellows are not required and should not be encouraged to disclose the reason for their absence.

- b. Leave can only be used in full or half-day increments.
 - c. The DAO will be flexible in approving leave requested in advance. Unless explicitly stated otherwise, a DAO's acknowledgment of the fellow's request will constitute approval, as long as the fellow has days remaining in their leave balance.
5. Fellows may take leave to observe culturally or religiously significant holidays. Alternatively, they may modify their fellowship schedule, with approval of their DAO, to allow time to observe these days.
6. When a fellow exhausts their leave balance for a calendar year or needs more leave than is available, they may request placement in absence without stipend (AWOS) status. Inquiries and requests should be directed to OITE-private@nih.gov to discuss options and procedures.
 - a. In general, all requests for placement in AWOS will be honored.
 - b. AWOS will be processed in no less than 5-day increments.
 - c. There is no requirement for a DAO to hold a position open for a fellow in AWOS status greater than 3 months.
7. Fellows who are absent from their fellowship for greater than 10 days without notifying their DAO, or another Agency official, and who fail to respond to inquiries from the Agency, will be placed in AWOS status and their appointment may be terminated.

PARENTAL LEAVE

1. Fellows are not eligible for Paid Parental Leave through the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA). However, fellows will be allotted up to twelve (12) weeks of excused absence with stipend for the birth, adoption, or foster care placement of a child(ren). The twelve (12) weeks may be used in a flexible manner over the course of one year starting on the date of the birth, adoption, or foster care placement.
2. Fellows may choose to use any combination of standard leave (referenced in the "Leave" section above) and parental leave.
3. Fellows are not required to exhaust their leave balance before taking parental leave.
4. Requests for parental leave should be made in advance by email directly to the DAO with anticipated start and end dates noted in the email. Subsequent changes to leave dates should also be documented in writing to the DAO. No forms or other documentation are required.

COMPLIANCE AND TRACKING

1. Fellows are not required to track their fellowship schedule daily. However, they are expected to certify that they met their fellowship obligations each week and to track professional development time and leave using the Fellowship Attendance and Schedule Tracker (FAST).
 - a. If a fellow consistently works less than 40 hours per week when not on approved leave, the DAO will reiterate expectations regarding fellowship schedules in writing and request confirmation of receipt. If the issue persists, the DAO will reach out to OITE-private@nih.gov for guidance.
 - b. If a fellow consistently works more than 40 hours per week and feels pressured or believes that they have not been appropriately accommodated with additional flexibilities, the fellow will express their concerns in writing to the DAO and request confirmation of receipt. If the issue persists, the fellow will reach out to OITE-private@nih.gov for guidance.
2. Fellows and DAOs should maintain a shared copy of the FAST and regularly review the contents to ensure proper accounting of schedules, professional development time, and leave balances.

- a. The FAST will transition to an online NIH-wide system as soon as practicable. All fellows must use the FAST; no other systems developed within the research group, program, or IC may be used.
 - b. A new FAST should be used at the beginning of each appointment renewal year.
3. The FAST must be saved electronically on the NIH network, using a shared location accessible to only the fellow and the DAO.
4. Fellows and DAOs must maintain copies of emailed requests for professional development time and leave for documentation purposes, in the event that either party raises concerns.

Any questions related to the administration and implementation of this policy should be directed to OITE-private@nih.gov.