Welcome to the University of Vermont! While we are small, UVM has a vibrant research community and we are glad you are joining us! Below are important details and useful information for your postdoc at UVM. Whether you are one of many postdocs in your lab group or the only postdoc in your college, the UVM Postdoctoral Association is here to answer your questions and help you out along the way. Not to mention share our favorite hiking and drinking spots! If you can’t find the answer here, please reach out to us at postdocs@uvm.edu and we’ll help you figure it out!

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I. Mission Statement of the PDA

The mission of the University of Vermont Postdoctoral Association (UVM PDA) is to promote a culture reflecting the University of Vermont Common Ground and six core competencies identified by the National Postdoctoral Association to facilitate professional development, broaden the training experience, and foster a vibrant, open, and collaborative community for all Postdoctoral Scholars at UVM.

II. Postdoc Scholar Definitions

a. Postdoctoral Associate. Most postdocs start as associates and are considered employees of the university. Associates have many benefits of full-time non-represented staff, including health insurance, dental insurance, disability, and life insurance, and university sponsored retirement plans. https://www.uvm.edu/hrs/postdoctoral-associates-benefits-overview
b. **Postdoctoral Fellow.** Postdocs that are hired for a training fellowship, or postdocs that obtain their own training grants, become postdoctoral fellows. While often considered a boon for your career, the university treats fellows as contractors at the university, and you lose access to several benefits, including dental insurance, disability, life insurance, and university sponsored retirement plans. You are still allowed access to health insurance through the university, but the details and cost changes from an associate. We'll go over this in the insurance section below.


c. **Why have two positions for the same job?** We hear you. And we know from experience how frustrating it can feel to work so hard on grants and finally get a fellowship only to lose your standing at the university- even though you are doing the exact. same. thing. The National Postdoctoral Association agrees, and this is one of their main platforms. https://www.nationalpostdoc.org/page/BriefOverview

III. **General New Hire Information**

a. **Orientation.**
   i. Everyone who is a new employee of the University, be you an associate or a fellow, needs to attend a two-hour orientation session run by Human Resources. Some UVM postdocs had issues where they were never informed they needed to attend orientation - you do! And it's super important for setting up payroll and tax forms, getting your CatCard, and enrolling for health insurance and dental insurance. If you are about to or have already started as a postdoc at UVM and haven't heard about an orientation day, talk to your department administrator and let them know you need to be signed up for one ASAP.

b. **National Postdoc Association Membership.** All new postdoc hires are automatically UVM PDA members and eligible for a National Postdoctoral Association affiliate membership under the UVM NPA sustaining membership. You can set this account up here: https://www.nationalpostdoc.org/general/register_member_type.asp?

c. **Postdoc Listserv.** All new postdocs are automatically added into the postdoc listserv. If you aren't receiving postdoc related notices, please email us: postdocs@uvm.edu. If you would like to unsubscribe for the listserv, follow the instructions here: https://www.uvm.edu/it/mailinglists/

IV. **International Postdoc Hire Information and Advice**

a. **Contact the Office of International Education.** If you are about to start an international postdoc at UVM, also begin this process by contacting the OIE. Circumstances can change quickly, so having this office to answer your specific questions should always be your first go-to. https://www.uvm.edu/oie
b. **Advice from personal experiences.** The following is a summary of advice from the personal experiences of UVM international postdocs, shared with permission:

i. **On J-1 Visas and a gap in funding.** Always get in touch with OIE as soon as you become aware of possible changes in employment status. Even if it is only a month or two gap in funding, let OIE know as soon as possible and they will help discuss the best way to handle your situation. UVM has an obligation to cancel J-1 Visas when a postdoc is no longer paid. If your J-1 status is cancelled and you leave the U.S., you may not be eligible for another J-1 status for the next two years. To cover gaps in funding, you can take paid vacation (leave of absence is not allowed on J-1). Again, talk to OIE, but they may be able to float a minimum salary requirement to get you across the gap. You should also make sure that your department’s administrative office and the administrator in charge of human resources is aware of the situation and the steps you are taking.

ii. **On F-1 OPT issues.** You may have just completed graduate school in the U.S. on an F-1 student visa, in which case you likely applied for OPT (optional practical training) to be able to work for 12 months while still in F-1 status. While you can use OPT at UVM to work as a postdoc, be aware that the 24-month OPT STEM extension is NOT available at UVM (as of early 2019). If you are in the first year of OPT and rely on getting the STEM extension to continue/complete your postdoc, contact your supervisor, your department’s HR administrator, and OIE as soon as possible to explore your options.

iii. **On navigating U.S. embassy appointments.** To obtain a visa, many international postdocs need to visit a U.S. embassy. Here are some pointers from a UVM postdoc:

   1. **Before appointment:**
      a. Get in touch with OIE and follow the procedure (on that they were great)
      b. Set up an appointment with a U.S. embassy. It is always recommended to visit the one in your home country, but depending on your situation it may be fine to just go to Montreal. Consult with OIE to determine the best course of action.
      c. Make sure your passport is valid for the duration of your stay in the U.S. plus 6 months.
   2. **Day of the appointment:**
      a. Show up 15-30 minutes early, without any suitcase/food/laptop, or really any items that are not stated as required in the documentation you receive from USCIS after making the appointment. Most of these items are not allowed within embassies.
      b. Be aware that your phone will be turned off and kept by security at the entrance until you are leaving the embassy - let your family know that you will not be reachable
c. Don’t show up for the appointment on an empty stomach – on very busy
days you might end up waiting inside the embassy for your interview
for several hours

d. DO bring some cash with you, in case the passport photo you provided
is deemed inadequate (even if it passed the test online during your
submission), the embassy will have a photo booth inside that you can
use to take the photo, but you will have to pay anywhere from $10-$20.

3. After the appointment:

a. The embassy will keep your passport: do not plan a trip right after the
appointment. You should receive your passport within 10 days at the
address you gave them (which has to be the same country the embassy
you went to is in), but there may be delays. Depending on the country,
if you explain your situation, they might be able to speed up the
process. In some cases you can also arrange to pick up the passport
from a courier office, or even from the embassy itself in special
circumstances. If you predict that you might have an urgent need to
have your passport back very quickly, ask OIE to draft a letter
explaining the situation and requesting this accommodation for you.

b. Inform your P.I./supervisor of the outcome of the appointment - in
almost all cases you will be told at the end of the interview whether or
not your visa will be granted. If you are not told one way or the other,
you should ask the interviewer before you leave, and if you are not
given a clear answer, contact OIE and your supervisor as soon as
possible.

V. New Hire Extras - Perks and Parking

a. CAT card. This is your photo ID, and also provides access to numerous other activities and
services, both on and off campus: https://www.uvm.edu/catcard. Here are some of the
things your CAT card can also do:

i. Provide entry to locked buildings and rooms you are authorized to enter. Your
department administrator will set this up - if however you don’t have access to the
places you need, or your access requirements change, go see your department
administrator. Some buildings and facilities may require additional authorization, but
your PI or department admin will help you with this. Most academic buildings are
locked before 7 a.m. and after 6 p.m. on weekdays, and on weekends and holidays.

ii. Free GMTA bus rides in the Burlington area and throughout Vermont! Just swipe your
ID and you never have to pay a bus fare.

iii. Access to the UVM library (both Bailey-Howe and Medical libraries) and serves as a
library card - they even have some fiction novels!

iv. Access to the UVM Fitness Center
v. Load money to pay for lunch! The Retail Point Plan for UVM faculty and staff allows you to load money onto your CATcard for the convenience of purchasing food on campus AND you get a 10% discount at the following eateries: Brennan's, Campus Perk, Cyber Café, Given Bistro, Green Roof Deli, Redstone Market, The Marketplace, University Marché, UVM Dairy Bar, Waterman Café & Waterman Manor [https://uvmdining.sodexomyway.com/my-meal-plan/index](https://uvmdining.sodexomyway.com/my-meal-plan/index)

b. **Tuition Remission.** Full-time postdoctoral associates are eligible to take up to 15 credit hours per academic year (September 1st-August 31st). The University will pay the comprehensive fee and summer session regular fees associated with courses taken. Less than full-time postdoctoral associates may take up to 6 credit hours per academic year. Be aware that most likely you will be responsible for paying tax on any courses paid by the University. Note that postdoctoral fellows are not eligible for tuition remission.

c. **CATMA Bike/Walk Reward Program.** Vermont is all about the man-powered commute. Sign up for this program and commute at least 24 days by biking, walking, bussing, or carpooling in an 8 week period and you get a reward! $15 gift card reward choices are City Market (local grocery), Merrill's Roxy Cinemas, or Skirack (also good at Patagonia).

d. **Parking.** Below is a summary of parking options for postdoctoral associates and fellows.

i. There are three parking zones on campus: Green, White, and Brown. All UVM employees start with the Brown permit and are allowed to put their name onto the Green permit waitlist (which is a 5+ year wait time... terrible, we know). It is important to opt-in and be added to this list. Green parking is UVM gold. If your name comes up, the options are to accept or go back to the bottom. Alternatively, if your personal situation allows for carpooling, carpool-parking permits are Green zone.

ii. Postdoctoral associates are considered eligible staff with regular payroll deduction for a parking permit. This means that the cost for the permit will be taken from your paycheck before taxes. Rates begin at 0.32% of your base salary (Brown permits) and increase concordant with permit type. (So if you make $45,000 a year, you would pay $144 a year, or $6 a paycheck. Check here for updated or other permit rates and options: [http://www.uvm.edu/tps/parking/employee/?Page=employeepayrolldeduction.html](http://www.uvm.edu/tps/parking/employee/?Page=employeepayrolldeduction.html)

iii. Since postdoctoral fellows are considered Independent Contractors, they are not eligible for pre-taxed deduction for parking permits and should buy an Affiliate Parking Permit from Transportation and Parking Services annually.
VI. Postdoctoral Fellow Tax Information

a. **Estimated Federal Tax.** A Postdoctoral Fellow’s paycheck has nothing taken out by the University. Fellows must pay their own tax at designated intervals. This is called estimated tax payments, and they occur quarterly (April 15th, June 15th, September 15th, and January 15th). Pay attention to your grant start date if you are switching from an associate to a fellow, because this will be the date you must start estimating taxes. *If you miss an estimated payment, you may incur penalties - so mark your calendars!* This is a helpful resource for paying estimated tax and worksheets to determine how much each payment needs to be (link should be updated to the current tax year, if not search for it): [https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p505.pdf](https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p505.pdf). Estimated federal taxes can be paid online here: [https://www.irs.gov/payments](https://www.irs.gov/payments).

i. We highly recommend that you take the time to fill out the tax worksheets with your own information, as this will provide you with the best estimate of what you should be paying. For the FICA tax components, enter zero (see below).

ii. Some things to note when determining your federal estimated tax payments. There are several separate taxes that are pulled out of your income:

1. **Income tax.** The percentage you owe is determined by the tax brackets you fall in (also called tax rate schedule). This changes often as politicians love to tinker with it, make sure you have the correct year before calculating.

2. **Federal Insurance Contributions Act (FICA) tax.** FICA tax is composed of two taxes:
   a. **Medicare tax.** This tax primarily pays for health insurance for American’s age 65 and older. The amount is 2.9% of your income.
   b. **Social Security tax.** This tax provides a retirement income to American’s age 65 and older. The amount is 12.4% of your income.
   c. Postdoctoral **associates** DO pay FICA taxes and these are taken out of your paycheck. Postdoctoral **fellows** **DO NOT** have to pay FICA taxes on their fellowships.

3. **How to report fellowship income on your taxes.** Fellowship income should be reported as “other income.” Tax preparation programs will often list this under a heading like, “less common income.” (Not self-employment income - which is subject to FICA taxes.) When prepared correctly, “SCH” should appear on the wages or other income lines of the 1040 tax form. (SCH = scholarship: the IRS lumps scholarships and fellowships together).

b. **Estimated State Tax.** Vermont only requires an income tax. The percentage you owe is also determined by a tax bracket (different than the federal tax bracket). Find this information for your tax year on the Vermont Tax website: [https://tax.vermont.gov/](https://tax.vermont.gov/).
Instructions for Vermont estimated taxes:

c. **Health Insurance is a Taxable Benefit.** Access to Health Insurance through UVM is the one benefit allotted to postdoctoral fellows. But beware: there are strings attached! Health Insurance becomes a taxable benefit, which means that *the value of your health insurance premium becomes income itself and you must estimate federal and state taxes on your paycheck income and the health insurance “income.”* The cost of your health insurance premium is determined based on your income, and the number of people on your health insurance plan. In addition, you are billed for 10% of your premium (postdoc associates are also billed for their premium but it is a smaller percentage that comes out of their paycheck). This comes as a bill in the mail, which you can pay by check or online with the following link, using the “guest payer log-in” option and entering your account banner number (found on your bill):
https://www.uvm.edu/studentfinancialservices/billing_and_payment_due_dates

We highly recommend trying to work these costs into your budget worksheets when applying for grants (see below), or getting health insurance through a spouse/partner to avoid these extra costs.

d. **Taxes for International Postdoctoral Fellows.** International Postdoc Fellows do have federal and state taxes withheld from their paychecks. The rate for J-1 visas is 14%, other visa holders are 30%. Some countries have income tax treaties that may reduce or eliminate federal tax withholding. If you have questions, check with OIE.

**VII. Safety and Responsible Conduct of Research Training**

a. Before starting into your postdoctoral research, you may be required to take online and in class safety training. These are run through Risk Management and Safety. https://www.uvm.edu/riskmanagement/training. Contact your department administrator and/or Risk Management if you have not been signed up for classes.

b. Some grants require all trainees, including the PI, to receive formal ethics training. UVM fulfills these requirements with the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI), an online, renewable training course https://about.citiprogram.org/en/homepage/. You may also be asked to take an in-class Responsible Conduct in Biomedical Research course (NSCI 327). Contact your department administrator or PI to discuss required ethics training.

**VIII. Funding Sources and the Sponsored Project Administration (SPA)**

a. Still want to be a fellow after getting through that tax section? Here we will summarize major funding sources for aspiring postdoc fellows.

   i. **Government funding sources.**

      1. **National Institutes of Health (NIH).** NIH has several postdoctoral fellowship opportunities. The earliest stage is the F32 mechanism (Ruth L. Kirschstein
National Research Service Award (NRSA) Individual Postdoctoral Fellowship), available through most of the institutes.  
https://www.nigms.nih.gov/Training/IndivPostdoc/Pages/default.aspx  
Also available is an International Research Fellowship for qualified non-immigrant foreign scientists:  
https://researchtraining.nih.gov/programs/fellowships/F05  
For senior postdocs who wish to stay in academia (but still within 4 years of your PhD), there is the mainstay Pathway to Independence Award:  

2. **National Science Foundation (NSF).** Several postdoctoral fellowships are available through the NSF. They have a nice summary on their website:  

3. **Department of Defense (DoD).** Several UVM postdocs have been awarded the Peer Reviewed Cancer Research Program (PRCRP) Horizon Award. Notices of calls for proposals can be monitored here:  
https://ebrap.org/eBRAP/public/Program.htm

4. **United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).** Several postdoctoral fellowships are available through the USDA, primarily through the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA):  
https://nifa.usda.gov/grants

ii. **Private funding sources.** There are many private funding sources available to postdocs, most contain specific requirements for application. Instead of trying to list them all here, we direct you to the University of Arizona Postdoctoral Affairs funding page, which has a thoroughly comprehensive list:  
https://postdoc.arizona.edu/content/find-funding

iii. **UVM-specific funding sources.** Every other year the UVM Cancer Center funds the two year J. Walter Juckett Postdoctoral Fellowship Award:  
http://med.uvm.edu/uvmcancercenter/members/awards-juckett

b. **The Sponsored Project Administration (SPA).** All external grant applications and funded grants are run through the SPA. SPA also provides tools for finding funding sources (like Pivot). Each department usually has an assigned SPA grant manager they work with, so double check with your administrator and/or PI. When applying for grants, keep in mind that they must be routed through the SPA system (InfoEd) for department, college, and university approvals before submitting to the funding agency. This process can take several days without problems, and more if they encounter issues. We recommend contacting SPA to let them know you will be applying for a grant one month before the deadline, and submitting your application for internal review 1-2 weeks before a grant deadline. Usually your SPA grant manager will also upload your final application to the funding agency, so keep those lines of communication open!  
https://www.uvm.edu/spa
b. **Filling out the Budget Form.** Most external grants you apply for will have you request a budget.

   i. Always request the full amount you are allowed for your grant, or get as close to it as possible.

   ii. **Direct vs. indirect costs:** Direct costs go towards paying your salary, your benefits, and your supplies. Indirect costs are what the university charges the funding agency on top of what you are awarded (if you get the grant). These funds go towards maintaining the lab space, like paying electric bills, heating bills, etc. Indirect costs can be anywhere from 8% to over 50% of the direct cost.

   iii. We highly recommend that you request full money for full benefits through your grant, even if you don’t need them at the time you apply. We have been in situations where we did not need funds for health or dental insurance at the time, but a year or two down the road we would and would not have access to them until the fellowship ended. Plan for the worst and request the costs up front!

IX. **Postdoc-ing with Kids**

a. **Daycare and Preschool for children under 5:**

   i. It is important to enroll your children in daycare as soon as possible because centers fill up quickly. Depending on the program, you may be put on a waiting list until a spot opens up (especially for children under 2). We recommend contacting a few programs just in case.

   ii. There are several options for childcare including daycare centers and in-home providers. The state of Vermont maintains an updated list of licensed and registered childcare providers. The list can be searched by town, program type, age, and other categories including accreditation.

   iii. If you prefer more assistance finding childcare, Child Care Resource provides Referral Specialists who can help match your needs to programs with openings.

   iv. UVM does have a Campus Children’s Center. This is a popular program with limited space, and we strongly recommend getting on the waitlist ASAP if you are interested in it.

   v. A full-time day usually runs from 7:30a-5:30p. Many centers have strict policies regarding pick-up times and do charge penalties for tardiness.

   vi. Full-time care costs ~$1000/month. Prices may be higher for infants. Many programs do have a sibling discount if you have >1 child at the center.

   vii. Vermont does provide subsidies on a sliding fee scale for families who need child care financial assistance.

   viii. Vermont has Universal Pre-K provided under Act 166. This covers 10 hours per week for 35 weeks annually of state-funded prekindergarten education for children >3 years old.

b. **School-aged children:**

   i. Your town of residence will likely restrict you to certain school districts.

   ii. Public schools are free of charge.

   iii. School hours are usually 8:00AM to 3:00PM, some day-care centers run after-school programs for primary school children.
iv. If available, your child can ride the bus. Some schools have walking zones, please be aware of these. If you reside within the walking zone of your school, your child will need to either walk/bike to school or you can drop them off.

v. Check the school calendar for holiday and winter/summer break closings.

c. Child-friendly activities: If you are looking for things to do with your children, Burlington and the surrounding areas have a variety of fun and educational opportunities. Some suggestions:
   i. ECHO Leahy Center for Lake Champlain (an annual membership here gets you free admission to >300 museums and science centers through the ASTC Passport Program)
   ii. Shelburne Farms
   iii. Smuggler’s Notch
   iv. Vermont Lake Monsters
   v. Hiking in any of our many State Parks, several parks have trails that are doable for children
   vi. KidsVT and Find and Go Seek are great resources with up-to-date event calendars and information for families
   vii. Encourage your kids to sign up for a Science Café (or volunteer to lead one yourself!) https://teensciencecafe.org/cafes/vteen4hsciencecafe/

X. Places to Live

a. Where to live. You would think there would be plenty of affordable housing when moving to a city hours away from major hubs of congestion. Unfortunately, that’s not the case for Burlington. There is a well recognized, trying to be solved shortage of affordable housing in the Burlington area. To be close to campus, you will also be competing with graduate and undergraduate students for apartments on the market. We recommend adding that newly acquired “PhD” to your name when inquiring after housing - most often, you will be viewed as a young professional and thus given a leg up over the student competition.
   i. Neighborhoods. Burlington is one of the safest cities to live in with a very low crime rate. While some areas may be a little more run down than others, all are safe for living in our opinion. For the most affordable areas, we recommend focusing on the UVM area, Downtown, the Old North End, the New North End, the South End (all areas of Burlington), Colchester, Essex Junction, and Essex. Moving farther away from Burlington is always an option as well, you will just be looking at a longer commute time!

b. Rent or buy? If you plan to be in the Burlington area for at least five years and can swing a down payment, we recommend you consider buying a house or apartment. Your mortgage payment will often be cheaper than renting.

c. Need to find a roommate? Burlington too expensive but you want to be close to UVM? Enjoy meeting people from different walks of life? Consider applying for the home share program: www.HomeShareVermont.org
XI. Things to Do Around Burlington

a. Get outside. Enjoy Lake Champlain and natural wonders of the Champlain Valley (ski, sled, sail, boat, swim, hike, bike, fish, etc.). Examples are Ausable Canyon, and Isle La Motte. Burlington culture is to be active and enjoy the outside.

b. Go for a hike. Burlington is located in Champlain Valley, between the Adirondack Mountains to the west and the Worcester Range of the Green Mountains to the east. One of our favorite (and cheapest!) activities is to get out in the mountains! Some of our favorite hikes are: Camel’s Hump, Mt. Mansfield, Stowe Pinnacle, Hunger Mountain, Snake Mountain, Mt. Philo, Niquette Bay State Park trails, Red Rocks Park trails, Colchester Pond trail.

c. Take a bike ride. Burlington has an extensive bike path system, including several miles of dedicated bike paths along Lake Champlain. We highly recommend biking north out onto the causeway, where the bike path juts out into Mallet’s Bay. The views are breathtaking!

d. Go for a downhill ski/cross-country ski/snow shoeing adventure. It’s winter you say? Take advantage of the multitude of outdoor winter activities Vermont has to offer! Here’s a list of our favorite locals:

i. Downhill skiing: Smuggler’s Notch Ski Resort (loving called “Smugg’s” by the locals), Bolton Valley Ski Resort (offers night skiing until 10PM), Jay Peak, Stowe, Sugarbush, Whiteface, Killington, Okemo, Stratton, Suicide Six, Mt. Snow, Mt. Sunapee, Bretton Woods.

ii. Cross-country skiing: Many downhill ski resorts also offer cross-country ski areas. The Von Trapp Family Lodge in Stowe has several miles of cross-country ski trails, and is considered one of the best in the area (be aware the area is not very flat). We also recommend just going out of the local bike paths around Burlington after a big snow!

iii. Snow shoeing: In addition to the above, which also offer snow shoeing, we recommend the Ethan Allen Homestead and Wheeler Nature Park as local alternatives.

e. Festivals, live music, shows and nightlife: Burlington is the host of many festivals, gatherings, shows, and other events. Many of these take place on Church Street or at the Waterfront. Common locations for shows are the Flynn Center for the Performing Arts, Higher Ground, and Nectar’s. Stay up to date on upcoming events and other news with Seven Days (https://www.sevendaysvt.com/) and The Burlington Free Press (https://www.burlingtonfreepress.com/).

f. Dining. Burlington thrives on its “eat local” philosophy. There are so many fantastic local restaurants, but moving here can be overwhelming as there are few chain options. We recommend choosing a new place each time you go out to eat for the first few months to
sample the local cuisine (No repeats! Come back to your favorites later!). To get you started here's a list of some of our favorite spots, broken up by meal:

i. **Breakfast/brunch**: Magnolia’s, Penny Cluse Café, Skinny Pancake, Mirabelles, Pingala

ii. **Lunch/Dinner**: Farmhouse Tap & Grill, American Flatbread, Pizzeria Verita, Sherpa Kitchen, A Single Pebble, Hen of the Wood, Pho Hong, Stone Soup, Our House, Mule Bar

iii. **Dessert**: Mirabelles, Lake Champlain Chocolates

iv. **Coffee/Tea**: Speeder & Earl’s, Muddy Waters, Dobra Tea, Uncommon Grounds

v. **Taprooms**: Zero Gravity, Citizen Cider, Simple Roots, Foam, 14th Star, Hill Farmstead, Lost Nation, Queen City (Note: there are numerous breweries in and around Burlington, many of which offer tours and tastings. Check out the Vermont Brewer’s Association to get started: [https://www.vermontbrewers.com/](https://www.vermontbrewers.com/)).