

Position Planning for Academic Research Titles

This tool is designed to assist in planning for the hiring and advancement of academic employees using the following titles:

- Postdoctoral Scholar
- Specialist (Junior, Assistant, Associate, and Full)
- Project Scientist (Assistant, Associate, and Full)
- Professional Researcher (Assistant, Associate, and Full)

Helpful Hints:

- All positions should be filled through an open search. A search waiver or search exemption may be possible provided that system-wide guidelines are followed. All recruitments, waivers, and exemptions must be approved via AP Recruit prior to the appointment process.
- An individual can only hold a Postdoctoral Scholar position for no more than five years. Please note that the five-year maximum includes time as a Postdoctoral Scholar at other institutions.
- An individual can only hold a Junior Specialist position for no more than two years. A third year may be approved by the Vice Provost as an exception.
- Principal Investigators (PIs) should mentor Postdoctoral Scholars and other academic researchers in a way that advances their careers and encourage them to engage in the merit and promotion process. Even if no change in title is anticipated, PIs should budget a minimum of 5% salary increase per year for academic researchers.
- If an international researcher is here on a visa and the appointment percentage is reduced, there may be visa implications. Please check with International Students and Scholars before reducing the percent time of an international scholar.

1. Is a high-level of expertise required?
 - If no, **Junior Specialist**. If the appointee does not meet the Junior Specialist criteria, this may be a staff research position. Contact staff Human Resources for more information about staff research assistants.
 - If yes, go to Question 2.
2. Is a terminal degree (ex: PhD, MD, DVM, JD, DSc, DrPH, MFA) in the relevant discipline required?
 - If no, go to Question 3.
 - If yes, go to Question 4.
3. Will the candidate be expected to provide advanced technical leadership based on extensive expertise and experience?
 - If no, **Assistant or Associate Specialist**.
 - If yes, **Associate or Full Specialist**.
4. Is the appointee expected to co-author peer-reviewed publications?
 - If no, go to Question 3.
 - If desirable but not required, go to Question 3.
 - If yes, go to Question 5.
5. Has the candidate previously held a postdoctoral position, or is the candidate currently a postdoctoral researcher at UC Merced or elsewhere?
 - If no, **entry-level Postdoctoral Scholar**.
 - If yes, go to Question 6.
6. Will the candidate have been in a postdoctoral position for a total of five years during the proposed period of employment at UC Merced? (Note: An individual can only be a Postdoctoral Scholar, across all institutions, for no more than five years.)
 - If no, **high-level Postdoctoral Scholar or Project Scientist**. A candidate in a postdoctoral position with active grants as a PI is eligible for appointment in the Professional Research series.
 - If yes, go to Question 7.
7. Is the candidate expected to be prepared to lead portions of a major research project?
 - If no, **Assistant Project Scientist**.
 - If yes, go to Question 8.
8. Is there an expectation that the candidate will advance professionally through creative intellectual leadership of major projects, including as lead author on peer-reviewed publications, lead PI on grants, or in a leadership role in large, collaborative grants?
 - If no, **Associate or Full Project Scientist**.
 - If yes, **Professional Researcher**.