University of Michigan Medical School

Primary Research Track

1. Definition of the Primary Research Track

The Medical School's Primary Research Track was created in 1973 to provide a differentiation between the instructional faculty and professional researchers. The Executive Faculty of the Medical School has adopted the following general criteria for the performance of Primary Research Track faculty:

Primary research staff must have achieved, or demonstrated the potential for, continued independence, autonomy, and excellence in the initiation, direction, and completion of research projects. Primary research staff either are clearly headed for or have already established themselves in independent academic research careers.

Appointment to the Primary Research Track does not preclude concurrent appointment in the Instructional Track.

2. Ranks in the Primary Research Track

There are four ranks of primary researcher: research investigator, assistant research scientist, senior associate research scientist, and (full) senior research scientist. All appointments are made by the president of the University.

Research Investigator
The initial primary research rank recognizes persons who hold a doctoral degree or its equivalent in professional and technical experience and who have shown special ability as independent researchers at least to the level of postdoctoral work. Some record of publications is expected of persons appointed to this rank, along with evidence of potential for obtaining external funding. A person appointed as a research investigator should have a specific role in a project that could be developed under a specific mentor. Candidates for research investigator are not expected to have a record of instruction or service, although achievement in these areas is a welcome addition.

Research investigator positions are intended for persons for whom a full-time career in independent research is expected. They are the prerogative of the department chair or unit head, within the constraints of University appointment procedures, and must be approved by the associate dean for faculty affairs. The Advisory Committee on Primary Research Appointments, Promotions, and Titles (APRAPT) does not review appointments of research investigators.

Assistant Research Scientist
Candidates in this rank must have documented excellence and independence in research that supports predictions of continued growth. They should have a record of publications in peer-reviewed journals and should appear as first author on at least some of these. Regular participation at professional meetings is expected. Candidates for assistant research scientist should show evidence of ability to obtain external funding, typically in the form of initial competitive fellowships or grants, and evidence that they can conduct research outside a mentorship situation. Again, there are no specific requirements for instruction or service, although achievement in these nonresearch areas is welcome.

Appointments of assistant research scientists require review by APRAPT and approval by the Executive Committee of the Medical School.

Senior Associate Research Scientist
Appointment to this rank requires evidence of continuing excellence in performance and a continued record of independent, distinguished, and productive research. There should be clear evidence of independent external funding past the level of initial research grants and fellowships, in the form of, for example, grants, subprojects, program projects, and center programs. There should be a solid record of publications in peer-reviewed journals and signs that this research record will continue. Many researchers appointed or promoted to senior associate research scientist have a substantial record of textbook co-authorships, book chapters, and abstracts; however, these publications count less heavily in evaluation than and cannot substitute for articles in peer-reviewed journals.

Like an associate professor who holds the corresponding rank in the Instructional Track, a senior associate research scientist should have a research record that would gain tenure in that track and should have a national reputation. A candidate for this rank should have received nationwide invitations for lectures, seminars, study sections, and ad hoc reviews. Some administrative or teaching contribution (such as committee service) is normally expected of a researcher at this rank. However, distinguished research performance is the essential requirement, for which nonresearch contributions cannot substitute. A person appointed as senior associate research scientist, like an associate professor, must be desirable as a permanent colleague and member of the staff.

Appointments of senior associate research scientists require review by APRAPT, approval by the Executive Committee of the Medical School, and endorsement by the provost.

Senior Research Scientist
Appointment to this highest rank in the Primary Research Track requires an internationally recognized record of continued excellence and independent accomplishments in research. Publications in peer-reviewed journals must continue and must show signs of further growth. A senior research scientist should appear as principal or co-principal investigator on center grants or major grants. A candidate for this rank is expected to serve as a mentor for younger faculty members and as a supervisor for graduate students. There should be invitations for lectures, seminars, study sections, ad hoc reviews, and so forth from outside the United States.

Appointments of (full) senior research scientists require review by APRAPT, approval by the Executive Committee of the Medical School, and endorsement by the provost.

3. Criteria for Appointment and Promotion in the Primary Research Track

Excellence and independence in research are supremely important for advancement in the Primary Research Track; that is, achievements in such nonresearch areas as teaching, patient care, administration, and service are not absolutely required of primary researchers and cannot substitute for deficits in research performance. However, Primary Research Track faculty are encouraged to work in these areas, for the sake of their own development as scientists and to enrich and invigorate the intellectual climate and reputation of the University. To the degree that these activities help the University in this way, they are credited to the candidate's record.

Although Medical School Primary Research Track faculty are not eligible for tenure, the University and the Medical School envision a close correspondence between the primary research ranks and the instructional ranks, both in qualifications expected and in the mechanics of appointment and promotion.

Dual-Track Faculty and Joint Appointments

A faculty member may hold appointments in both the Instructional Track and the Primary Research Track if fully qualified for appointment in both. For dual-track or joint appointments in two different units, the distribution of responsibility and the part-time status in each unit must be specified and approved by the chairs, directors, and deans of the units involved and by the provost and the vice president for research. Similar approval must be given for joint appointments to the Medical School and another school or college within the University.

The Medical School is reviewing all requests for dual-track and joint appointments with increased diligence to ensure that the effort assigned to each track and/or unit is appropriate to the mission of the department and the skills of the individual faculty member.