

**UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS MD ANDERSON CANCER  
CENTER**

**ODYSSEY FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM  
AND OUTSTANDING RESEARCH PUBLICATION  
AWARDS**

**GUIDELINES**

## **I. MISSION STATEMENT**

The mission of the Odyssey Program is to support the best individuals among the newest generation of cancer researchers at MD Anderson Cancer Center and encourage them to explore novel areas of clinical, translational, basic or population-based cancer research and to take advantage of the resources offered by our Institution. The Odyssey Program supports the training and research efforts of dedicated scientists at the beginning of their career in cancer research and promotes their interaction with colleagues.

The objective of the Awards for Outstanding Research Publication is to recognize the achievements of postdoctoral fellows for work accomplished at the MD Anderson Cancer Center. The annual awards are sponsored and managed by the Odyssey Program. When a recipient is chosen, he or she will be acknowledged as the first or co-first author of an outstanding contribution to the scientific literature in the broadly-defined area of cancer research.

## **II. ODYSSEY FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM OVERVIEW**

The Program achieves its goal by appointing Odyssey Fellows and supporting their salary and research efforts. Fellows are appointed following a competitive peer-review of written proposals, performed by the Odyssey Program Advisory Committee once a year. Fellows can be supported for a maximum of three years, and their appointment start date coincides with the start of the fiscal year, which runs September 1<sup>st</sup> to August 31<sup>st</sup>.

The Director of the Odyssey Program is responsible for the operation of the Program, including managing the review process, the collection and evaluation of annual reports, and the oversight of the fiscal and administrative aspects of the Program. The Advisory Committee is responsible for the evaluation of the scientific merit of applications and reports. The Director and Advisory Committee together periodically evaluate the Program Guidelines.

## **III. ODYSSEY FELLOWSHIP ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA AND NATURE OF SUPPORT**

Odyssey Fellows must have a doctoral degree (Ph.D., M.D., D.Phil. or equivalent). Must have postdoctoral appointment less than **two (2)** years before funding starts (September 1<sup>st</sup>) if the postdoctoral appointment has always been at MD Anderson, or less than **three (3)** years total at any combination of institutions. Applicants must either have an appointment at MD Anderson, or have been offered an appointment by a member of the faculty of MD Anderson, and plan to take the position before or at the time funding starts (September 1<sup>st</sup>), in order to be eligible to apply.

Odyssey Fellows can be supported by the Program for a maximum of three years, starting and ending with the fiscal or academic year defined as running from September 1<sup>st</sup> to August 31<sup>st</sup>. Appointments are for one year periods, and renewal for the second

and third year are subject to progress as assessed on the basis of a progress report, prepared by the Fellow, and reviewed by the Director of the Program, in consultation with the Advisory Committee when necessary.

Levels of support are set annually, depending on the availability of funds. Salary support will consist at a minimum of NIH NRSA level for appropriate PGY, plus fringe benefits. The goal and maximum level of support is 20% above the NIH NRSA level for that PGY.

When sufficient funds are available, the Odyssey Program will provide each Fellow with \$5,000 per year in laboratory or research funds. If a positive balance of laboratory or research funds remains at the end of the fiscal year, and the Fellow is appointed for a subsequent year, then only funds sufficient to top up to \$5,000 will be provided. If a positive balance remains at the end of the last year of a Fellow's tenure in the program, the funds will return to the Odyssey Program. Negative balances that remain in any year and which are not covered by a subsequent year's funds are the responsibility of the Fellow's host department or laboratory.

Laboratory or research funds can be used for supplies at the discretion of the Fellow. They can also be used for travel to a scientific meeting, provided the Fellow presents at that meeting, and acknowledges the support of the Odyssey Program in their presentation. Expenditures are subject to the institutional guidelines regulating Company 8 accounts, which can be accessed via the intranet ([inside.mdanderson.org](http://inside.mdanderson.org)).

If a current Odyssey Fellow changes mentor or makes a significant change in their research direction during the time that they are supported by the Program they must notify the Director as soon as possible. The Director together with the Advisory Committee will determine whether continued support by the Program is appropriate under such circumstances.

#### **IV. COMPETITION FOR ODYSSEY FELLOWSHIPS**

Once a year, a Request for Applications will be announced to the faculty and fellows of MD Anderson using electronic communications, including email and the Program webpage. The format and extent of the application materials, as well as the means of applying and deadline for receipt of applications will be indicated in this announcement. Usually the Request for Applications will be made in January, and the application deadline will be in February, preceding the intended funding start date of September 1<sup>st</sup>.

Applications will consist of a completed Odyssey Fellowship Application Form, a letter from the advisor indicating willingness to mentor and outlining a training plan, biosketches in NIH format for the applicant and the advisor, Summary of Proposed Research of no more than 5 pages, not including literature cited, which has Specific Aims, Background and Significance, Experimental Plan, Training Potential and Statement Regarding Innovation sections, and a Career Statement providing a brief summary of past research by the applicant and future career plans. Up to three published manuscripts may be attached.

The supporting letter from the mentor should include a brief training plan, addressing approaches to mentoring and opportunities for training that the mentor will provide.

The Odyssey Fellowship Application form requests information on two referees, neither of them the advisor. It is the responsibility of the applicant to download the Odyssey Recommendation Form, send these forms to his/her referees, and follow-up whether the Odyssey program coordinator received the letters. Letters received past the deadline will not be included in the packet and incomplete submissions will be disqualified.

Applications are reviewed by the Odyssey Advisory Committee in the March or April prior to the funding start date, following the general format and approach used by NIH Study Sections dealing with fellowship (F32, K99/R00) applications. Review criteria will include (1) quality of the applicant, (2) quality of the proposal, and (3) quality of the mentoring statement from the sponsoring mentor. The reviewers will prepare critiques to be communicated to the applicant. Each proposal will be reviewed by two or three members of the Odyssey Advisory Committee. Additional faculty may be requested to participate in application review on an ad hoc basis, as necessary.

By submitting an application, the applicant indicates that the proposal is their original work.

A maximum of **two Odyssey Fellowships** per PI at any one time will be awarded.

#### **V. OUTSTANDING RESEARCH PUBLICATION AWARDS**

The Outstanding Research Publication Awards include a monetary prize, a certificate and an invitation to give a public presentation at an Odyssey Program-sponsored public seminar, where the award will be officially presented to the winner. The size of the monetary award depends on the level of funding by the sponsor.

The awardee must have been employed at the MD Anderson Cancer Center as a postdoctoral fellow when the selected research article was submitted for publication. The awardee must be the first author or co-first author on this article and the work must have been done at MD Anderson. The paper must be either already in print or e-published at the time of the award competition. If the paper is already published, the publication date must be less than one year prior to the award competition deadline.

The Odyssey Publication Award recognize excellence in **two research categories – basic and translational**. Both basic and translational publications will be selected based on significance, novelty, and likelihood that the reported findings will advance the field.

The application consists of a brief description (4 bullet points) explaining the importance of the publication, the research paper under consideration (published paper or e-published manuscript) and classification whether it will be considered for basic or translational category.

The Odyssey Advisory Committee will select the winner based on the following set of criteria:

- Importance and novelty of the work described in the manuscript
- Likelihood that the reported findings will open new research areas
- Impact in cancer patients and understanding of cancer biology

If several outstanding entries score similarly on these initial selection criteria, additional considerations for final winner selection will include:

- The number and importance of other recent publications by the same author
- The number of additional authors on the publication under consideration (listing fewer authors suggests a larger contribution by each author)
- How well the publication is written

## **VI. ODYSSEY ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

It shall be the function of the Odyssey Advisory Committee to:

- Review applications for Odyssey Fellows and rank them in order of scientific merit.
- Review applications for the Outstanding Research Publication Awards and select recipients based on the aforementioned eligibility criteria, guidelines and standards.
- Conduct yearly reviews of the Program and of the current Fellows as necessary.

The Odyssey Committee is comprised of a Chair, Co-Chair, and approximately 15 Members, all of whom are faculty members representing various departments at MD Anderson Cancer Center. The Odyssey Committee reports to the Director of the Odyssey Program.

Odyssey Advisory Committee members must meet the following criteria:

- Must be faculty on staff at MD Anderson Cancer Center representing a variety of specialty areas
- Must be able to commit to a three-year term
- Must be able to attend committee meetings as scheduled

The Odyssey Advisory Committee Terms and Limits are as follows:

- All Committee members serve a term not to last more than three (3) years, September 1 through August 31.
- The Chairperson shall serve for a term of one (1) year. At the end of that year, he/she will terminate his/her obligation as Odyssey Committee member.
- The Co-chair, chosen from among the Committee Members, serves for one (1) year. At the end of his/her term as Co-chair, he/she will automatically rotate into the position of Chair.

It shall be the responsibility of the Director of the Odyssey Program to solicit recommendations of faculty to fill vacancies made by those members whose term on the committee are ending, as well as recommendations for Co-chair, when the term of the current Co-chair expires.

The Odyssey Committee will meet in conjunction with the application deadline for the Odyssey Program to review applications and ensure compliance with the guidelines and criteria, and to rank the applications in order of scientific merit. The committee shall provide written critiques and a score to applicants following NIH practices of fellowship (F32, K99/R00) review. Each application shall be reviewed by a primary and one or two secondary reviewer(s), chosen by the Chair of the Advisory Committee.

The Odyssey Advisory Committee will also decide the recipient(s) (if any) for the Outstanding Research Publication award(s) (if any).

#### **VII. CONDITIONS ASSOCIATED WITH APPROPRIATION OF FUNDS**

Funding for the Odyssey Program Fellows and Scholars is provided by the following:

- ❖ Theodore N. Law Award for Scientific Achievement
- ❖ The Scientific Achievement Endowment Fund comprised of:
  - Houston Endowment, Inc. Award for Scientific Achievement
  - H-E-B Award for Scientific Achievement
  - Cockrell Foundation Award for Scientific Achievement
  - Kimberley Foundation Award for Scientific Achievement
- ❖ The CFP Foundation
- ❖ Anonymous

The Outstanding Research Publication Awards are sponsored by:

- ❖ The Ernst W. Bertner Memorial Fund
- ❖ The Heath Memorial Fund.

#### **VIII. NOTICE OF AWARDS AND COMMITTEE DECISIONS**

Winners selected on the basis of ranking by the Advisory Committee shall be notified of their status first by e-mail, and then by a formal letter from the Director of the Odyssey Program. A second letter, from the Office of Trainee and Alumni Affairs, will detail their obligations and expectations as an Odyssey Fellow, and will include an agreement stating that any publication or presentation of work done at MD Anderson Cancer Center as an Odyssey Fellow must be attributed to funding by the Odyssey Program:

*“Funding as an Odyssey Fellow was supported by the Odyssey Program and the {name of funding source only} at the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center.”*

**{name of funding source only}** relates to the different funds that support the program (see VII above).

## IX. ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

Oversight of the Odyssey Program and the Odyssey Program Advisory Committee as well as administrative support is conducted through Academic Affairs and AVA -Trainee.

It shall be the responsibility of the Administrative Support person in Academic Affairs to:

1. Schedule all meetings of the Odyssey Advisory Committee, and take minutes / action item notes where appropriate
2. Process All correspondence relevant to the Odyssey program, including external and internal communications to include:
  - ❖ Maintain contact information for Committee, including member rotation
  - ❖ Assemble, distribute initial applications to the committee for review during each funding cycle
  - ❖ Distribute and email award letters including Outstanding Research Publication Awards
  - ❖ Provide administrative support in coordinating activity for the Annual Odyssey Mini Symposium
  - ❖ Assist with updating Odyssey metrics at the end of the Fiscal Year
  - ❖ Maintain Odyssey database
3. Maintain a list of all program winners
4. Maintain up-to-date financial data relevant to funding of each Fellow
5. Request and maintain progress reports on Odyssey Fellows

### **- Trainee Responsibilities:**

1. Coordinate all appointments and reappointment letters for the Odyssey Fellowship program.
2. Process certificates for program completion after verifying training
3. Confirm annual (NIH NRSA) stipend levels for Awardees
4. Verify current stipends and PGY levels
5. Maintain database for research appointments
6. Maintain appointment schedules
7. Track appointments and reappointments start/end dates

## X. CHANGE HISTORY

These Guidelines are amended periodically on the recommendation of the Odyssey Advisory Committee or to reflect changes in the Program. This section gives a brief list of changes that have been made.

7/2008:

- Descriptions of the Outstanding Research Publication Awards were generalized to reflect changes in sponsorship.
- I. Mission Statement was amended:
  - "...encourage them to explore novel areas of clinical, translational, basic or *population-based* cancer research..."
- III. Odyssey Fellowship Eligibility Criteria were amended:
  - The statement "The host laboratory and advisor for the Odyssey Fellowship must be different from those that supported the applicant's graduate training." was added.
- IV. Competition for Odyssey Fellowships



- The statement: “The supporting letter from the mentor should include a brief training plan, addressing approaches to mentoring and opportunities for training that the mentor will provide.” was added.
- The statement “By submitting an application, the applicant indicates that the proposal is their original work.” was added.
- VII. Conditions Associated With Appropriation of Funds
  - The CFP Foundation was added to sponsors of the Program.

7/2009:

- IV. Competition for Odyssey Fellowships
  - The elements that the Application will consist of were modified to reflect the use of the Odyssey Fellowship Application Form rather than the prior online system, the change of the advisor letter to no longer evaluate the applicant but to provide a training plan, and the addition to the Research Summary of two sections, Training Potential and Statement Regarding Innovation, and the addition of a Career Statement to the application.
  - The review criteria were amended to be Significance, Applicant/Candidate, Innovation, Approach and Environment/Training Potential.
- VII. Conditions Associated With Appropriation of Funds
  - The Laura and John Arnold Foundation was added to the sponsors of the Program.
  - The Ernst W. Bertner Memorial Fund and The Heath Memorial Fund were added as sponsors of the Outstanding Publication Award.

5/2010:

- VII. Conditions Associated With Appropriation of Funds
  - The Pauline Altman-Goldstein Foundation was added to sponsors of the Program.

11/2011:

- VII. Conditions Associated With Appropriation of Funds
  - Anonymous was added to sponsors of the Program.
- IVa. Competition for Odyssey Fellowships
  - *The following section was added to describe the new Odyssey Recruitment Fellowships that were made possible with the support of an anonymous donor:* When funds are available, the Program Director may inform the faculty that Odyssey Recruitment Fellowships are available. These fellowships [...] subject to satisfactory progress as documented by the annual progress report.

8/2012:

- IV. Competition for Odyssey Fellowships
  - 1<sup>st</sup> paragraph, line 6 ..... January, and the application deadline will be in February, preceding the intended funding start date of September 1<sup>st</sup>.
  - 5<sup>th</sup> paragraph, line 2: March or April .....
  - Added last paragraph: “A maximum of two Odyssey Fellowships per lab at any one time will be awarded.”
- IVa. Competition for Odyssey Fellowships
  - Added last paragraph: “A maximum of one Odyssey Recruitment Fellowship per lab at any one time will be awarded.”

6/2013:

- III. Odyssey Fellowship Eligibility Criteria and Nature of Support
  - 1<sup>st</sup> paragraph, line 3 added..... before funding starts (September 1st) if research time is at MD Anderson or less than three (3) years at any combination of institutions.



- VII. Conditions Associated with Appropriation of Funds
  - Deleted donor: Pauline Goldstein-Altman Foundation

12/2015

- VII. Conditions Associated with Appropriation of Funds
  - Deleted donor: Laura and John Arnold Foundation
- IVa. Odyssey Recruitment Fellowships
  - Deleted this category

6/2016

- III. Odyssey Fellowship Eligibility Criteria and Nature of Support
  - Deleted the following:  
The host laboratory and advisor for the Odyssey Fellowship must be different from those that supported the applicant's graduate training.
- IV. Competition for Odyssey Fellowships
  - The following was added:  
The Odyssey Fellowship Application form requests information on two referees, neither of them the advisor. It is the responsibility of the applicant to download the Odyssey Recommendation Form, send these forms to his/her referees, and follow-up whether our office received the letters. Letters received past the deadline will not be included in the packet and incomplete submissions will be disqualified.
- VII. Conditions Associated With Appropriation of Funds
  - Kimberley Foundation Award for Scientific Achievement was added to sponsors of the Program.

#### Proposed Changes for 9/2019

- I. Mission Statement
  - Replaced main author to first and co-first author
- III. Odyssey Fellowship Eligibility Criteria and Nature of Support
  - Replaced, "the degree must have been conferred", with "Must have postdoctoral appointment less than than **two (2)** years before funding starts (September 1<sup>st</sup>) if the appointment is at MD Anderson, or less than **three (3)** years at any combination of institutions."
- IV. Competition for Odyssey Fellowships
  - Last paragraph, replaced the statement, "Significance, Applicant/Candidate, Innovation, Approach, and Environment/Training Potential", with "(1) quality of the applicant, (2) quality of the proposal, and (3) quality of the mentoring statement from the sponsoring mentor."
- V. Outstanding Publication
  - Second paragraph, replaced "officially accepted for publication" with "e-published".
  - Added a third paragraph:
  - Fourth paragraph
    - i. replaced "400 words" with "4 bullet points"
    - ii. Deleted "a curriculum vitae or biosketch in NIH format – 2 pages maximum – including a complete list of publications".
    - iii. Added, "(published paper or e-published manuscript) and classification whether it will be considered for basic or translational category.

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- Fifth paragraph, added " for basic research, and impact in the scientific community for translational"