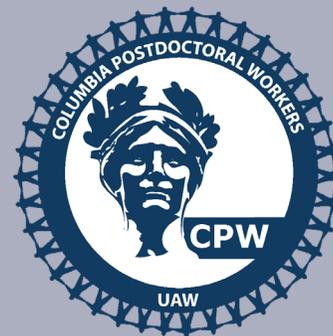


# How Organizing Improves the Postdoc/ARS Experience



	WITHOUT A UNION	WITH A UNION
Compensation	Salary minimums were the lowest for Postdocs in NYC, lagging behind other research institutions in the city, and annual raises were unequally applied. Fellows were routinely paid less than other Postdocs.	Highest minimum salaries for Postdocs in NYC (14.5% to 20% increases to minimums first year of contract). Guaranteed 2.5% increases in Years 2 and 3. Lump sum bonuses of ~2-4% for those near or above the new minimums. Fellows are now guaranteed the same minimum compensation as other Postdocs.
Non-Discrimination	No neutral, fair dispute resolution process, and no enforceable timelines or protections for researchers. Outcomes were decided entirely by Columbia.	Stronger protections against sexual harassment and discrimination, including union representation, interim measures, and the right to take complaints to a neutral arbitrator. Postdocs/ARS who report a claim are protected to ensure their research and career progress are not derailed.
Personal Time Off (PTO), Holidays, Vacations	Personal time off, holidays, and vacation were unevenly applied and enforced. Requests for time away from work were often denied or discouraged by PIs.	Enforceable contractual right to two vacation days per month up to 23 days, 14 paid holidays/personal days per year. Vacation days roll over until June in the year following the one in which they are accrued.
Childcare Benefits	Before we started organizing, the childcare benefit was \$2,000 and was not accessible to Fellows.	After we reached majority support for our union in 2018, Columbia raised the childcare benefit by \$1000 twice, up to \$4,000. We negotiated these improvements into our contract and Fellows for the first time have equitable access to the benefit.
Leaves of Absences	Leaves of absence were not guaranteed and requests were often denied by supervisors or departments. No fully paid parental leave.	Guaranteed access to a range of paid leaves. For the first time researchers have 6 weeks of parental leave at full salary followed by another 4 weeks at 60%, in addition to 6-8 weeks of medical leave for the birth mother.
Visa Processings	No protection against loss of appointment due to issues with visa processing or international travel.	Appointments must be held open for at least 60 days if work authorization is delayed, and researchers are guaranteed paid time off for immigration-related proceedings. The University will make efforts to allow researchers to work remotely if unable to return to the US and help researchers with proper paperwork who are barred entry to the US.
Health & Safety	Columbia unilaterally set and enforced health and safety standards.	Researchers have the right not to work in conditions that pose an immediate danger, to relevant health and safety training and proper equipment, and to protection against retaliation for raising health and safety concerns. Our contract establishes a joint Union-University health and safety committee to make ongoing improvements.

	<b>WITHOUT A UNION</b>	<b>WITH A UNION</b>
<b>COVID-19</b>	Without a union we had no unified, democratic voice with which to convey issues and concerns to the university administration. Columbia was also able to make changes to our working conditions unilaterally.	During COVID-19 we organized surveys and meetings on the return to in-person work, and conveyed to Columbia how concerns raised across campuses should be taken into consideration when restarting the research program, including anonymous reporting mechanisms and clearly communicated safety guidelines.
<b>Workloads</b>	There were no limits on the number of hours or days that a PI could require that Postdocs/ARS work.	Postdocs/ARS can only be required to work as much as is reasonably necessary to complete the project.
<b>Bullying</b>	No policy against power-based harassment, or bullying.	Columbia must form a committee with our union and other campus groups to develop a university-wide policy to address bullying, with an enforceable timeline, and acknowledges that bullying is a pervasive issue at CU.
<b>Discipline/Dismissal</b>	Postdocs/ARS could be disciplined or dismissed arbitrarily, or “at will.” Columbia could lay off Postdocs/ARS at any time and for no reason without notice or compensation.	Columbia must prove “just cause” in order to discipline or dismiss Postdocs/ARS. Discipline and layoffs require very specific conditions and are subject to the union grievance procedure.
<b>Grievance Procedure</b>	No neutral process to resolve disputes arising from workplace issues. Columbia had final say over all decisions.	Researchers have access to a fair process for resolving violations of our contract with enforceable timelines, union representation, and protection against retaliation, giving us an equal ability to enforce the terms of our contract. Researchers have the right to take a dispute to a neutral arbitrator if not resolved at earlier steps of the process.
<b>Professional Development</b>	No guaranteed performance evaluations or the right to create an IDP with your PI. Access to career development resources could be removed at any time.	The University will maintain support for training and professional development programs. Researchers have the right to work with their PI on an Individual Development Plan (IDP) and the right to at least one written evaluation within each 12-month period.
<b>Political Advocacy</b>	No unified Postdoc/ARS voice in national policy making.	We’re affiliated with the UAW, a nationwide union that represents more than 80,000 graduate student workers, postdoctoral researchers, and others in higher education. With fellow UAW workers we have a stronger collective voice to lobby for the issues that matter to us. We can also play a key role in electing pro-science, pro-education candidates.
<b>Appointments/ Reappointments</b>	Frequent delays and gaps in compensation and benefits due to delayed paperwork. Appointments could be less than one year.	Establishes that appointments are normally one year. All researchers receive written appointment notice including information about the position and union representation. Columbia must make best efforts to avoid delayed pay and benefits and provide a reappointment letter no later than start date of the reappointment. Researchers can now enforce the right to three months notice if Columbia does not intend to renew an appointment.

## **Become a Member of the Union!**

The power we have as a union comes from the continued majority support of Postdocs/ARS at Columbia. Whether enforcing the rights listed above, developing critical resources for researchers, or winning more rights in the future, our success is dependent on all of us joining in collective efforts to improve our working conditions and make Columbia a better place to do research. To sign up as a member of our Union, go to <https://columbiapostdocunion.org/get-involved-form/online-membership-card/>

*NOTE: This is only a summary. Please refer to the actual contract at [columbiapostdocunion.org](https://columbiapostdocunion.org) for detailed information.*