Vanderbilt University School of Medicine
Policy for Observers in Research Laboratories

Note: This policy is not intended to apply to minors (persons under the age of 18), students enrolled in advanced degree programs, research or clinical fellows, or persons holding faculty appointments.

The breadth of biomedical research in the School of Medicine creates an array of opportunities for individuals to participate in an enriching educational or research experience by observing or “shadowing” an investigator and his/her research staff over a period of time, or by volunteering to participate directly in the research activities for a limited time period.

An observer in a research laboratory is an individual who wishes either

a) to gain an understanding of the nature of research so that he/she can make informed decisions about a career in this area, or

b) to offer to society an unpaid service with no expectation of a reward other than personal satisfaction.

In all cases without exception, both investigator and observer concur that the observation will not, in any way exclude a qualified employee from his/her employment. In other words, lacking the involvement of said observer, this activity would not be performed by an employee.

This policy outlines the parameters by which such experiences will be established in all research laboratories in the School of Medicine. Upon implementation of this policy, informal (ie. unreported) observational or volunteer experiences in research laboratories are prohibited.

1. The coordination and approval of student experiences under the age of 18 will be the responsibility of the Center of Science Outreach (CSO). CSO can be contacted through their website or at (615) 322-7140. The coordination and approval of observers age 18 and over will be the responsibility of the Office of Biomedical Research, Education and Training (BRET). The BRET office can be contacted at (615) 343-4611.

2. Individuals eligible for observational or educational experiences under this policy should not concurrently hold temporary or permanent employment positions in the laboratory with which they wish to be associated. All current employees of Vanderbilt University must inform the BRET office that they are an employee when applying for an observational experience. Individuals in laboratories under this policy shall not routinely perform independent activities which would normally be performed by regular employees and which might thereby exclude such employees from legitimate employment.

3. Educational experiences under this policy are primarily designed to inform an individual about the nature of biomedical research, educational programs in research, and potential
career paths. As such, experiences are intended to be time limited and generally should not exceed eight weeks duration.

4. Pursuant to Tennessee Code Annotated 50-5-106, minors are not allowed to have access to certain hazardous workplace setting. If a SOM lab is entertaining allowing a minor (person under the age of 18) to participate in an observational experience you will need to contact the Center for Science Outreach.

5. At least 30 days prior to beginning the observational experience, an online application for each observer must be submitted by the Vanderbilt sponsor through the BRET office website and it should include the following information:
   a. (Name of sponsor) Faculty member and department accepting responsibility for this experience
   b. Name and date of birth of the applicant
   c. Address, including emergency contact information
   d. Location(s) of the experience
   e. Duration of the experience (number of weeks and number of hours per week)
   f. A brief summary of the objective of the experience
   g. Summary of any hazardous exposure in the laboratory
   h. A list of any anticipated training required
   i. Current place of employment

6. The CSO or BRET office will consult with the lab mentor concerning all required orientation and training, which must take place before the applicant begins the educational experience. A department must insure that the applicant provide evidence of having received all required training before the experience begins. The OSO or the BRET offices as appropriate will also assist in obtaining an appropriate Vanderbilt identification badge for the student and any other necessary access permissions.

Revised: 05/15/2009
FACULTY AGREEMENT FORM

I AGREE TO SPONSOR: __________________________________________________
Applicant’s name

I AGREE THAT:

• I have read, understand, and will adhere to the Vanderbilt Medical Center “Policy for Observers in Research Laboratories”.
• The applicant has or will have completed the required safety training prior to beginning the educational experience.
• Personal protective equipment appropriate for the laboratory environment will be provided
• My laboratory is in full compliance with all Vanderbilt University safety programs and regulations

_____________________________________________________
NAME OF FACULTY SPONSOR

_____________________________________________________
SIGNATURE

_____________________________________________________
DATE

Return this form to:
BRET Office
Attention: Nadia Ehtesham
340 Light Hall

Fax: (615) 343-0749

Scanned, PDF copies may be sent by email to nadia.ehtesham@vanderbilt.edu