

Faculty Merit Reviews



Why Do Merit Reviews? (5 sec.)

What Process? (4 min.)

Who Benefits? (3 min.)

Is this THE Topic? (2 min., 55 sec.)

Why Do Merit Reviews?



They are required by the faculty code.

What Is The Process?

Three Faculty Code requirements:

- All faculty prepare a yearly activity summary
- All faculty reviewed (via “regular conferences”) at rank-determined intervals
- All faculty considered for salary increment (“additional merit”)

Chemistry rolls these steps into one process:

The Chair solicits from all faculty:

- a) A two-page “short” CV in a standard format covering the past five years of activity

And from those who are due for a regular conference:

- b) A one-page narrative summary of recent past activities
- c) A one-page narrative summary of planned future activities

For Regular Conferences:

The two-page CV, past activities, and future plans guide the conference with the Chair.

(A staff assistant assembles a binder containing these items for each faculty member, along with teaching evaluations and a page for the chair to take notes during the conference. The documents from the most recent review are provided to offer comparative context. In the past, the Chair has dictated summaries to then be handed out as formal memoranda; this year the effort is to have faculty sign-off on the spot.)

For Consideration for Salary Increase:

Two-page CVs distributed to all faculty members, along with a ballot, allowing faculty to “score” their colleagues on a 1 – 5 scale, relative to career-stage-matched peers.

Scores massaged by the Chair, then together with career stage (years from Ph.D.) used to calculate a “target salary.”

The Chair consults with Academic Personnel Committee prior to recommending salary increases to the Dean.

I have found (shock! shock!) the faculty on balance tend to undervalue teaching and service.

Major Caveat:

Faculty code requires faculty to consider the full career, conference summaries, and current salary of those assessing.

To meet this, we “encourage” faculty to come view the full CVs and recent conference summaries on file in the front office. We offer to all faculty a current salary list on request; the vast majority do not want to know.

Who Benefits?



Younger Faculty Members:

Younger faculty benefit the most from learning what constitutes “success”

Teaching effort, publication type and frequency, funding levels, research group size, service expectation

These meetings stimulate self-directed goal setting

Longer Serving Faculty Members:

Longer serving faculty benefit (to a point) from learning how their contributions compare to those of their peers

Absent evidence otherwise, most of my colleagues believe they are above average in all things

I have seen Associate and Full Professors ramp up their program (after initial denials that it is possible in their sub-field) in response to such meetings

Weaker Faculty Members:

Over geologic time scales (over five years), the weakest performing faculty move from anger to acceptance.

It can be helpful to have a committee advise a weak faculty member that the assessment is widely held, and not just the view of the evil dictator.

Is This THE Topic?



True or False?

Many junior faculty candidates accept our offer of employment because they learn we have an excellent merit evaluation system.

We routinely lose faculty members to Harvard because that institution has a more comprehensive merit evaluation system.

FALSE

THIS Is THE Topic:



Our merit evaluation system is failing to adequately reward high merit, and is very, very good at punishing low merit.

Myth versus Reality:

Myth #1: UW faculty salaries are low because we have low per-student funding

Reality: UC Irvine and UC San Diego have essentially identical per-student funding to UW, but pay their faculty peer-level compensation

Myth #2: UW faculty salaries are low because the state has not sent enough new money every year

Reality: For almost two decades, the UW state + tuition budget has grown by over 4% per year, very close to the rate at which academic salaries are rising nationwide

Reality:

Our faculty salaries are low because of how we have chosen to spend our money. Among these is the choice to have a low student/faculty ratio.

University of Colorado	31:1
University of California, San Diego	28:1
University of Florida	27:1
University of Wisconsin	27:1
University of California, Irvine	26:1
University of Utah	26:1
University of Arizona	25:1
University of Missouri	24:1
University of Washington	21:1
University of Kentucky	20:1
University of Cincinnati	20:1
University of Hawaii	17:1

For this reason, we spend a larger fraction of our state + tuition budget on faculty than many peer schools, despite paying lower average wages to individual faculty members.

Full Disclosure: There are quality schools (e.g. Michigan) with student/faculty ratios comparable to UW. Those institutions have stronger per student funding.

Take Home Lessons:

There is considerable value to following the faculty code

The review process provides some opportunities to help faculty (help themselves)

The BIG problem is the lack of adequate reward for faculty accomplishment, a problem we could choose to address.