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
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 Hawai'i: 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.