

**Merit Pay Distribution Plan for
Professional-Track Faculty**

Approved 2022 March 14

I. Preamble

In compliance with the University of Maryland Policy on Faculty Merit Pay Distribution¹, as amended in September 2017, this document provides a merit pay distribution plan for professional-track (PTK) faculty in the Department of Astronomy (the Department).

This plan was circulated and then discussed in a meeting of the faculty of the Department of Astronomy on 28 February 2022, with 43 members present. A number of changes were discussed with a revised draft circulated before a meeting on 14 March 2022. Following University Senate procedure, the faculty voted on the plan. The plan was approved unanimously. This vote is a positive vote as defined by the Department's Plan of Organization.

II. Merit Review Committee activities

1. Purpose of committee

The Merit Review Committee (the Committee) is tasked with meeting every year, reviewing their peers' activities and accomplishments for previous years (as defined in Section II.7) with an emphasis on the most recent year. The Committee will produce a categorized list and, for each faculty member, a summary statement noting any strength(s) and weakness(es) that played a part in the evaluation. The Committee is advisory and reports to the Department Chair.

2. PTK faculty to be reviewed

PTK faculty subject to this plan are faculty with titles such as Faculty Specialists and Research Scientists/Engineers/Professors at all ranks and who spend at least 50% of their time in the Department of Astronomy.

In years with merit pay, the university may place additional guidelines on who is or is not eligible for merit pay. However, the committee should evaluate all members to provide summary statements for evaluation letters from the Chair.

Those not covered by this plan are:

- Lecturers, who will be reviewed with the TTK following the *Appendix 1B: Merit Pay Distribution Plan for Tenured/Tenure-Track Faculty*.
- Postdoctoral Associates (Postdocs), Faculty Assistants (FAs), and faculty with "Visiting" modifying their title, who will be evaluated by their supervisors.

3. Composition and selection of committee

¹ UMD Policy VII-4.00(A), which is referred to as "University policy" in the current document.

Committee members will be elected by and from the PTK faculty being reviewed (as defined in Section II.2), and should be ≥ 0.5 FTE in the Department of Astronomy at the time of election. Elections are called by the Department and should be held near the beginning of the spring term. A quorum of more than 50% of these faculty is needed to elect the Committee members. The Committee shall consist of five members, each of whom serves for three years (followed by a minimum seven years off). The Committee shall select a chair from within the voting members to lead the discussions.

4. Committee member succession

To propagate experience from one year to the next, committee members will serve staggered terms, with either one or two members rotating off each year, to be replaced by new members elected as described in Section II.3. The initial Committee will be elected and then there will be a random drawing amongst the committee to determine the initial service length of each member. In subsequent years, one or two members will rotate off with one or two new members to be elected for a 3 year term. If a member is unable to continue serving their term (e.g., leaving the Department) they are replaced during the next election, with the replacement starting a new three-year term. If the absence occurs between the election and the meeting, then the Committee may need to meet with a quorum of four elected members. If circumstances arise in which a quorum of at least four elected members cannot be assembled or term overlap is disrupted to the point where year-to-year carryover is problematic, the Committee, in discussion with the Department Chair, will determine how to resolve the issue.

5. Meeting

At least one meeting shall occur during the Spring semester of each academic year for the purpose of evaluating and characterizing the merit (as outlined in Section II.7) for each PTK faculty member, regardless of whether merit pay is anticipated that year. The meeting(s) will be held in a timely fashion after the deadline for submission of the professional activities report. The meeting(s) shall consist of a quorum of at least four elected members of the Committee. The Department Chair and the Department's senior administrator for faculty affairs shall meet with the Committee members to discuss the evaluations.

6. Supporting documents

Documents may be submitted using electronic forms. The following materials, gathered by the Department from appropriate sources and provided to the Committee, will be required for evaluation for merit pay:

- a. The professional activities report, which may include the optional personal statement(s), submitted through the University's official self-reporting system (e.g. *Faculty Success*);
- b. Statement of work (SOW).

For supervised faculty, a brief evaluation from the supervisor(s), also obtained by the Department, is recommended.

Professional activity reports are expected to be submitted by faculty members and should include all professional activities, accomplishments, any teaching or mentoring, as well as an optional personal statement. The personal statement is an opportunity to describe a member's work activities as compared to the expectations expressed in the SOW that may not be captured in the activity report. These statements should be concise, typically 1-2 pages and no more than 3 pages. It is the responsibility of faculty members to update, maintain, and submit

their activities in a timely manner. After the annual deadline, a collection of the activity report submissions for the time period to be considered by the Committee is then provided by the Department to the Committee. In very rare instances when a PTK member is not able to submit an official report (e.g., hospitalization), an alternative brief statement may be provided through the Department, at the discretion of the Department Chair.

The statement of work (SOW), submitted by the supervisor(s) through the Department, for each member describes the responsibilities, activities, and scope of work of that faculty member, relevant for the evaluation period. The SOW should be reviewed regularly by the member and their supervisor(s). Faculty who are self-funded and have no clear supervisor should submit their SOW through the Department.

A brief evaluation, submitted by the supervisor(s) through the Department, is recommended to provide the Committee with their perspective as well as to help ensure that the Committee has a complete view of accomplishments that may not have been captured by the University's official self-reporting system. A statement of no more than 1-2 paragraphs is sufficient. For the purpose of this policy, a supervisor is a University employee who administers at least partial financial support for the PTK faculty member. In the case of PTK faculty members supported by Cooperative Agreements, the Principal Investigator (PI) of the Cooperative Agreement will determine the supervisor(s). PTK faculty members often raise a significant portion of their own support as grant PIs (or Institutional PIs) and/or have multiple supervisors. Evaluations from those supervisors providing at least 30% of the PTK faculty member's support are encouraged. For faculty who are self-funded and have no clear supervisor, accomplishments should be well-captured in the personal statement portion of the activity report and supervisor evaluations are not necessary. Lack of a supervisor evaluation shall not negatively impact the Committee's characterization of a PTK faculty member's performance.

7. Evaluation criteria

The Department of Astronomy Plan of Organization Bylaws 2A establishes general criteria for performance at the different levels for PTK faculty, and further expectations based on the rank and title. The performance criteria are centered on three general categories: research, education, and service. Because the responsibilities of PTK faculty are diverse, these categories are not necessarily equally represented in a faculty member's activities. Therefore, the SOW, which provides a more specific description of duties beyond the general guidelines, is an important reference for evaluating performance.

The Committee shall evaluate the professional activities and achievements of each PTK faculty member relative to the - evaluation criteria and expectations based on the rank and title; and the responsibilities as summarized in the SOW. However, given the number of faculty under review, the Committee may divide the workload by having each committee member read and evaluate overlapping subsets of PTK faculty members. Evaluations should be based solely on the materials listed in Section II.6. A helpful characterization of performance may be the following categories: 'outstanding', 'exceeds expectations', 'meets expectations', 'below expectations', and 'weak'. After such characterization, further differentiation among the relative performance of PTK faculty members may become clear. The Committee shall then collate and refine the categorizations. In the end, the Committee shall categorize the performance of each PTK faculty member relative to that of other members and write a brief (e.g., 1-2 sentences) summary statement for each faculty member that may be used in the evaluation letter from the Department Chair.

Committee members shall not be involved in the evaluation of their own activities. They shall leave the meeting room during discussion of their own evaluations.

The evaluation period will be the previous three years with an emphasis on the most recent year. The Committee may need to consider additional years beyond the three years, based on University policy (e.g., VII-4.00(A) Sections D.1.b. and E.2.b.) and on guidance from the University concerning the current merit pay distribution.

8. Reports Generated and Retention of Records

The Committee will produce an electronic report with:

- A list of members sorted into categories; and
- A short summary statement for each member to be used by the Department for feedback to members.

The report will be kept by the Department for reference.

9. Confidentiality

The Committee shall hold evaluations, discussions, and any related material(s) in strict confidence and shall not share outside of the Committee. Committee members shall delete or destroy all material when it is no longer necessary for evaluations.

10. Certification

The Committee shall certify to the Department Chair that they have followed the procedures outlined in the Department's Merit Pay Distribution Plan for Professional-Track Faculty, or will provide a rationale in any situations where they have deviated from the Plan.

11. Promotion Consideration

The merit committee should also identify faculty members who should be considered for promotion and bring them to the attention of their supervisor(s) and the Department Chair.

12. Summary

Who is being reviewed?	Who can serve on the committee?	Input documents	Output documents
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Faculty Specialists• Research Scientists/Engineers/Professors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Faculty Specialists• Research Scientists/Engineers/Professors• ≥ 0.5 FTE at start of service	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Professional Activity report• SOW• Supervisor's evaluation (recommended)• Committee report(s) from prior year(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sorted list• Brief summary statements

Lecturers, faculty with "Visiting" in their title, Postdocs, FAs are not reviewed under this plan.

The following is an outline of events relevant for the merit review process:

- Elections in early Spring semester

- Professional Activity Reports typically due mid-March
- Department provides documents to Committee
- Committee meets and deliberates
- Committee submits report to Department Chair
- In merit years, Department Chair finalizes merit distribution
- Evaluation Letters sent to PTK faculty

III. Department Chair's Responsibilities

The Department Chair has the responsibility to determine merit pay increases and merit dollar distribution, subject to revision by the Dean, and will be advised in this endeavor by the information and discussion provided by the Merit Review Committee. The Department Chair and Department's senior administrator for faculty affairs are strongly encouraged to attend the Merit Review Committee meetings. The Department Chair will also make their own independent assessment of the Merit Review Committee results in order to ensure that individual accomplishments in research, education, and service that might be unknown to Committee members will be properly reflected in the new salary recommendations. The Department Chair should have a record of justifications for deviating from the Committee's recommendations, in case there are appeals.

The Department Chair shall provide the Department with information on available sources of funds for merit increases during the merit review process each year. Merit pay will be assigned in dollar increments rather than as a percentage of salary. Annually, the Department Chair will evaluate the salary structure to identify salary compression or inequities that have developed in the Department. In consultation with the Dean and other relevant persons (Grant and Cooperative Agreement PIs), the Department Chair will address these issues by reserving a fraction of the salary pool. That fraction of the PTK salary pool reserved will typically be, and shall not exceed, the fraction of the TTK pool reserved by the Dean and Provost for similar purposes.

In accordance with University policy, the Department Chair shall report their final salary recommendations back to the Merit Pay Committee.

Each faculty member will receive a letter from the Department Chair containing their new salary and salary increase; a brief evaluation of the faculty member by the Department Chair and Merit Review Committee; and information about the appeals process. The "brief evaluation" may be the summary statement produced by the Committee for their report.

Each year the Department shall call for elections to fill vacancies in the Merit Review Committee (as outlined in Sections II.3 and II.4). Additionally, each year the Department Chair shall review the makeup of the Merit Review Committee over the previous five years to assure that a reasonable representation, based on the gender and racial distribution and the various scholarly interests of the Department, has been achieved and if it has not, the Chair shall encourage faculty members to more carefully consider diversity in their committee choices.

The Department Chair shall certify to the Dean that they have followed the procedures outlined in the Department's Merit Pay Distribution Plan for Professional-Track Faculty, or will provide a rationale to the Dean in any situations where they have deviated from the Plan.

IV. Appeals process

Faculty members have the right to appeal the merit pay decision via a formal letter to the Department Chair. The appellant may meet with the Department Chair or the Department's senior administrator for faculty affairs, who will then relay the Committee's discussions on that particular faculty member's case. If the faculty member is still not satisfied, they may write a letter to the Department Chair that will be included in the materials provided to the Committee the following year. In addition, the faculty member may consult with the University Ombudsman.

V. Modifications and Amendments

The Merit Pay Distribution Plan for Professional Track Faculty may be modified and amended as specified in the Department of Astronomy's Plan of Organization or as required by University policy.