I. **Preamble**

This document provides a merit pay distribution plan for Professional Track faculty in the Department of Astronomy.

This plan documents the Department’s current policies, as brought into accord with the most recent University of Maryland Policy on Faculty Merit Pay Distribution, Policy Number: VII-4.00(A), University reporting systems, and approved elements within the Department’s Plan of Organization.

II. **Review of Professional Track faculty activities**

Professional Track faculty have varying degrees of responsibility in the three areas that the University considers in merit and promotion.

1. **Research-related activities**, falling in two categories:
   a. Directed activities established as a condition of employment. These activities are normally defined by a supervisor who provides salary funding and should be defined by agreement between the faculty member and supervisor.
   b. Independent research in the area of the faculty member’s expertise. This research is normally supported by external grant funding directly to the faculty member.

2. **Education.**

3. **Service to the Department, University, community, and profession.**

   In all cases the fundamental measure of success is the faculty member’s contribution to moving the field forward, directly or indirectly.

III. **Merit Review process**

For Professional Track faculty members at the first rank, the Department Chair shall solicit advice on merit pay distributions from the grant PIs and supervisors responsible for their salaries. PIs and supervisors shall propose merit amounts in either dollars or percent increases, with a total raise recommendations not to exceeding the amount provided by the Department. Justification will be required for percentage amounts that differ substantially from the average increase. Faculty who fund themselves with external grants exceeding 50% of their total salary shall also be independently reviewed by the Merit Review Committee convened for the second- and third-rank faculty.
Second- and third-rank faculty whose funding from multiple sources (e.g. external grants, cooperative agreement grants, State funding) exceeds 33% of their total salary shall be independently reviewed for that portion of their effort by the appropriate groups, which are described below. The Department Chair shall take all reviews into account when setting the Department’s recommendation.

Lecturers of the second and third ranks are included in the TTK merit review process, as set out in Appendix 1B of the Department’s Plan of Organization.

Merit evaluation for non-lecturer Professional Track faculty at the second rank and above shall be evaluated by a Merit Review Committee consisting of three elected Professional Track faculty members who shall advise the Department Chair. Committee members shall be directly elected annually via secret ballot by the Professional Track faculty at the second rank and above for staggered three-year terms. Insofar as possible, the Merit Review Committee’s composition over a period of years will reflect the distribution of Professional Track faculty, scholarly interests, gender, and racial/ethnic distribution of the Department. To this end, as part of the election process the Department Chair will provide a list of faculty who have served on the Committee during the past seven years, identify areas in which the distribution has been poorly represented over the prior five years, and encourage a distribution that reflects the composition of the faculty. Election to consecutive terms is not allowed. The rotation in membership of the Committee helps ensure that the priorities of the Department are fully reflected over time.

Each year every eligible PTK faculty member at the second and third ranks shall provide the Department with the following information:

1. A statement of impact describing achievements for the previous three years with emphasis on the immediately preceding year. All relevant activities showing the faculty member’s accomplishments should be included, and a brief description of future perspectives may also be included. This statement shall not exceed one page (12 pt type, single spaced, 1” margins on US letter paper.
2. A copy of the standard campus annual report (Academic Success, Digital Measures, etc.) or a substitute specified by the Department.
3. A copy of the faculty member’s current CV, and if the candidate desires, publication list preferably in University format.
4. For candidates with directed research and support activities, two related brief written statements:
   a. A statement of expectations for the directed activities of each faculty member as agreed between the faculty member and their supervisor.
   b. A brief written report by the faculty member’s supervisor, whom the Department will encourage to compare activities with the statement of expectations for the preceding year. (This also constitutes a review of expectations, and the coming year’s expectations revised accordingly.)
5. Other material may be requested by the Committee or provided by a faculty member for consideration, the latter at the committee members’ discretion.
Some or all of the material may be in the format required by the University for annual reports. These documents will be retained by the Department for at least three years, or until they are no longer to be used during faculty evaluations.

The Department shall organize the information listed above and provide it to the members of the Merit Review Committee.

The Merit Review Committee shall use this written material to evaluate faculty contributions in one or more of the areas described in Section II, as appropriate from the faculty member’s expectations for duties:

1. Directed research and research-related support activities. The chief measure here shall be the comparison of accomplishments to expectations. Information from supervisors is very important here, and missing information will weaken the evaluation.
2. Research, scholarship, and creative activities. Measures to be used in this evaluation will include the quantity and quality of publications in refereed journals, citations to refereed publications, and success in acquisition of research funding. Each CV should indicate the number of citations associated with each refereed publication. First-author papers carry more weight than others, although publications with the faculty member’s student as first author carry nearly as much weight, and should be indicated in the CV. Releases of computer codes, construction of scientific instruments, and other work that advances the field also fall in this category.
3. Educational activities in teaching, advising, and mentoring. Measures to be used in this evaluation will include evidence of active student and/or postdoctoral mentoring, and teaching contributions as revealed by student and peer teaching evaluations.
4. Service to the University, community, and the profession. Measures to be used in this evaluation will include the level and amount of service on departmental, campus, community, and external professional committees.

Committee members independently evaluate the other committee members and provide their results to the Department Chair before a meeting of the entire committee.

Each committee member shall provide brief evaluative comments and a score for each of research, teaching, and service for each faculty member. These shall inform the Department Chair of specific strengths or weaknesses and the rationale for the score with the ultimate goal of producing a ranked list of faculty by merit (ties are permitted). The suggested rubric for scoring performance in each area is NA for not applicable, 0 for none, 1 for below expectations, 3 for meets expectations, 4 for above expectations, and 5 for outstanding. Fractional scores are permitted, and many faculty will entirely reasonably have no activity in one area or another. Scoring should reflect that most faculty members will meet or somewhat exceed expectations. “Grade inflation” is to be avoided, and scoring must also reflect areas where the faculty member has not met expectations. The Department Chair will provide general guidance for expectations, but each committee member is free to select criteria and the weight given to
elements within the individual areas in calculating the score. The weights and criteria may vary year to year, but these and the general methodologies used by each member shall be reported to the Department Chair. The Department Chair may use this information in the salary letter and in discussions with the faculty member without attribution.

For each year when merit pay is not available, the achievements of faculty members for that year will be taken into consideration during the next year in which merit pay is available.

The Department Chair shall convene a meeting of the Merit Review Committee to discuss the scores and general evaluations for all faculty members. Committee members shall leave the meeting room during discussion of their own evaluations.

IV. Advancement Review
The Merit Committee shall also separately review progress toward advancement for all faculty members it reviews, and call the Department Chair’s attention to faculty who should be considered for promotion or other advancement. The Committee and Chair shall discuss faculty advancement as part of the Merit Committee meeting.

V. Confidential materials
The Committee shall hold evaluations and any related material in strict confidence. Committee members will certify that they have followed the Department’s Merit Pay Distribution Plan (this Plan), or will provide a rationale in any situations where it has deviated from the Plan.

VI. Department Chair’s Responsibilities
The Department Chair has the responsibility to consider all information in this review process to determine merit increases and merit dollar distribution, subject to the 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 will also make his or her 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. For this purpose, the Department Chair may separately consult with grant PIs, supervisors, and faculty members.

Merit pay must be distributed in dollar increments rather than as a percentage of salary, but the committee may propose amounts in either category. The Department Chair shall evaluate the salary structure of the Department annually and consult with the Dean with the goal of addressing salary compression or inequities that have developed in the Department. A portion of the money from the merit pool may be reserved for the Department Chair’s discretionary use to address special salary considerations. The portion reserved will be determined by the Department Chair in consultation with the Committee, and should be between 0 and 33% of the merit pool.

Each faculty member shall receive a letter from the Department Chair or designee reporting the new salary and the salary increase. The letter shall identify in general terms the Merit Review
Committee’s evaluation of the faculty member and how this was used to assign the merit increase. The letter shall inform the faculty member that she or he may request a meeting with the Department Chair to receive an explanation of the merit pay decision.

The Department Chair shall certify that she or he has followed the Department’s Merit Pay Distribution Plan, or will provide a rationale to the Merit Review Committee in any situations where he or she has deviated from the Plan.

VII. **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, who will then relay the Committee’s discussions on that particular faculty member’s case. The appellant may request a meeting with the Committee. If the faculty member is still not satisfied, he or she may write a letter to the Department Chair that will be included in the materials provided to the Committee the following year.

VIII. **Modifications and Amendments**

The Interim Merit Pay Review Plan shall be approved or replaced following the Department’s Plan of Organization as soon as is practical.