

Academic Unit Head—Responsibilities, Selection, and Evaluation

Original Implementation: March 7, 1978

Last Revision: October 31, 2022

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to outline the roles of the unit head of an academic department/division/school.

Definition

The unit head is the chief executive of an academic department/division/school (hereafter referred to as “academic unit” or “unit”).

Responsibilities of the Unit Head

The primary responsibilities of the unit head are to establish and maintain a climate conducive to the pursuit of knowledge. The decisions of the unit head should be made and implemented in the context of collegiality and regular communication. More specifically, the administrative responsibilities of a unit head include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Provide leadership in the establishment of a visionary direction and the maintenance of standards for the academic unit, consistent with college and university missions;
- Serve as the principal advocate for the unit and as an advocate for the college and university missions;
- Ensure quality through evaluation, modification, and development of academic programs;
- Respond to the needs of students, faculty, administration, the public, and others;
- Develop and manage course schedules for each semester/parts of term;
- Assign and manage faculty workload
- Manage and allocate fiscal and physical resources of the unit;
- Establish, maintain, and communicate effective personnel management procedures and processes; and
- Promote the academic unit externally.

Selection of the Academic Unit Head

A search and screening committee will be used in each search for an academic unit head. The dean of the college will meet with the faculty of the academic unit prior to the selection of the screening committee and will determine whether a search should be open or closed to outside candidates.

1. The committee will be formed by the dean of the college in consultation with the faculty of the academic unit and with the approval of the provost and executive vice president for academic affairs. The committee will have an odd number of members, with at least five

members. The committee may be larger depending on the size and complexity of the unit's programs.

2. Every committee will have representation from outside the academic unit and at least one member with appropriate administrative experience. Outside representatives will be appointed by the dean after considering recommendations by the faculty.
3. Once the size of the committee is established, the faculty will elect its specified number of representatives to the committee. Faculty members eligible to vote will hold faculty rank of instructor, assistant professor, associate professor, professor, or librarian I-IV in the academic unit. When possible, all tenure-track ranks will be represented on the committee. In all cases, the faculty will elect a majority of the committee. Changes to the composition of the search committee may be considered with the approval of the dean and the provost and executive vice president.
4. The dean will convene the committee for its organizational meeting at which time the committee will elect its chair and other officers. Guidelines for the logistics of the search will be provided by the dean, in accordance with any requirements of the Department of Human Resources. The committee chair will inform the faculty of the names of the committee members.
5. Candidates invited to campus for interviews will be provided ample opportunity to meet faculty, students, the dean of the college, the provost and executive vice-president for academic affairs and the committee, as well as other individuals and groups, as appropriate.
6. Following the interviews, the committee will invite comments from all faculty, staff, students, and other individuals and groups, as appropriate, who were involved in the campus visits. The committee will forward strengths and concerns for each finalist and/or a recommendation to the dean along with a summary of comments. The dean, in turn, will forward strengths and concerns and/or a recommendation to the provost and executive vice president for academic affairs that is accompanied by all previous recommendations and summaries.
7. The provost and executive vice president for academic affairs, or designee, will make the appointment for an indeterminate term, subject to approval by the president and the Board of Regents.

Academic Unit Head Appointments

Academic unit heads may be hired under either an eleven-month or twelve-month contract.

Academic unit heads under an eleven-month contract are expected to be on duty each workday within the contract period when classes are in session. It is the responsibility of academic unit heads to ensure that ongoing academic unit obligations are met during their absence. Vacation time is not accrued under an eleven-month appointment. Sick leave is earned according to the schedule for Texas state employees. Academic unit heads under an eleven-month contract are also subject to being called upon to address a task or issue outside the normal workday when it is determined by the dean to be in the best interest of the university. Academic unit heads who are appointed for eleven months should have no university duties during the equivalent of one calendar month (twenty-one workdays throughout the year). The twenty-one days will be logged in the academic unit office and approved by the respective dean prior to unit heads taking leave from duties.

Academic unit heads under a twelve-month contract are expected to be on duty each workday. Vacation and sick leave are earned according to the schedule for Texas state employees. Academic unit heads are subject to being called upon to address a task or issue outside the normal workday when it is determined by the dean to be in the best interest of the university.

Evaluation of the Academic Unit Head

The evaluation of the academic unit heads is designed to promote academic excellence throughout the university. This process takes two forms: periodic reviews by the academic unit faculty, and annual administrative evaluation by the dean. The annual administrative evaluation provides the basis upon which to award merit to unit heads.

1. The unit head will be evaluated annually by the dean of the college. In making an evaluation, the dean will consider the responsibilities of the unit head as stated above, while any additional criteria will be communicated to the unit heads in advance of the evaluation period.
2. After the completion of the first year and every third year thereafter, the faculty of the academic unit will evaluate the unit head's performance. A summation of the faculty's evaluations of the unit head will be included as a component of the final evaluation report. Following the faculty's evaluation, the dean will meet with the unit faculty to discuss the unit head's performance. In the event the dean does not provide feedback in a timely fashion, the unit faculty may request a meeting regarding the matter.
3. The evaluation of a unit head may be initiated at any time by a majority of all full-time faculty or at the call of the unit head, dean, provost and executive vice president of academic affairs, or president. Comments which may have been received relative to the unit head's performance and the advisability of retention should be carefully weighed for both the annual and triennial reviews. Exceptions to the evaluation timeline require approval of the dean in consultation with the provost and executive vice president of academic affairs and would reset the triennial cycle.
4. The dean will review with the unit head the results of each evaluation. A report of the evaluation and any recommendations will be submitted to the provost and executive vice president for academic affairs.
5. The unit head will have ten (10) working days from the date of the review to submit to the provost and executive vice president for academic affairs a written response to the dean's report.

Merit for Academic Unit Heads

Merit pay for unit heads will be based on the annual administrative evaluation conducted by the dean. The dean will submit a recommendation on each unit head in the college to the provost and executive vice president for academic affairs for merit consideration.

Teaching Load for Academic Unit Heads

The teaching load of academic unit heads is determined annually by the college dean in consultation with the academic unit head based on the changing needs and objectives of the unit.

Factors such as number of faculty (full-time equivalent [FTE]), number of majors, and complexity of the unit are considered in determining the teaching load of the unit head for the full contract year (September 1 through August 31).

Cross Reference: Faculty Handbook, Faculty Merit Pay (7.6); Faculty Workload (7.13); Sick Leave (12.18)

Responsible for Implementation: Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs

Contact for Revision: Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

Forms: Department Chair Administrative Effectiveness Appraisal

Board Committee Assignment: Academic and Student Affairs

Revision History: October 28, 2019
 January 31, 2017
 July 29, 2014
 July 20, 2010