

Guidelines on Department/Division Head (DH) annual merit review letters issued to faculty

1. The letter should be issued to faculty at the conclusion of each year's assessment exercise to inform them of the overall assessment of their recent (last two/three years) performance by their Department/Division Faculty Merit Review Committee and Department/Division Chair.
2. The letter should be informative and constructive and should convey a feeling of positive encouragement
3. The letter should use the language and holistic standards and spirit of the new Faculty Performance Matrix, to wit
 - The assessment of a faculty member's performance in each of the three areas of primary duties and activities, namely, teaching and education ("teaching" for short), research and scholarship ("research" for short), and service should be holistic, depending on a number of key performance attributes, and should not be mechanical. It would be inappropriate to simply count the number of publications or to focus exclusively on the students' teaching evaluation summary statistics. In any academic review, including annual merit review, a faculty's overall performance should be summarized in words, not only with numbers.
 - The annual merit review is for the purpose of performance feedback and salary adjustment. Faculty research performance in any given year of assessment should be based on some reasonable moving averages, say over a few years, rather than exclusively on the new publications and other forms of recognition in that particular year alone. The review should also take into account the faculty member's career accomplishments and professorial rank.
4. That being said, for those colleagues who have deficiency in some areas, the letter should point out specific areas for improvement.
5. While there is no standard template for the letter, the following can be considered by the DH in drafting their letters:

First paragraph - Thank the colleague for his/her contributions in the previous year, and outline the objective of the annual merit review and letter, e.g., to review and recognize their performance in research, teaching, and service; offer feedback; and suggest areas for improvement in the spirit of the new faculty performance matrix

Second paragraph – The second paragraph on research should begin by giving some broad guidelines as to the departmental understanding of Very Good/Excellent research in the colleagues' specific subfield and then commend colleague's recent research

achievements using the five Faculty Performance Matrix categories: excellent, very good, good, satisfactory, unsatisfactory.

Third paragraph – The third paragraph on teaching should use the five Faculty Performance Matrix categories - excellent, very good, good, satisfactory, unsatisfactory – to inform colleagues of the overall assessment of their effectiveness at teaching, distinguishing where relevant between UG and PG teaching, small class and large class teaching, as well as PhD thesis mentoring and PhD placement.

Fourth paragraph – The fourth paragraph on service should use the five Faculty Performance Matrix categories - excellent, very good, good, satisfactory, unsatisfactory – to inform colleagues of the overall assessment of their service contributions to their division/department, school, and university. DH are not obligated to write this paragraph for beginning assistant professors in the first two years of their contract since they are largely exempt from service obligations. DHs are expected to be informed of faculty service performance of more senior assistant, associate, full, and chair professors whose primary appointment is in their unit.

Fifth and penultimate paragraph - Suggest areas of improvement, especially in areas prioritized by department/school/university policies.

Final paragraph - Thank the colleague again for his/her contributions and end the letter with a positive note.

6. In using the five Faculty Performance Matrix categories - excellent, very good, good, satisfactory, unsatisfactory – the DH should be careful to align these categories with those for promotion and substantiation.
7. DH should not indicate faculty individual standing within their department/division as this may create an unnecessary tension among colleagues. It is more important for faculty to know how they perform on an absolute basis, rather than relative to other colleagues.
8. A copy of the letter should be put into the faculty file and become part of their record. The letter should also be shared the following year with the annual merit review committee so they can assess colleague's improvement.
9. While the annual merit review letter is a key part of the assessment of faculty performance, the letter should also explain that since actual salary adjustments depend on the recommendation of the Dean and the approval of the Provost as well as such other factors as the current salary of the faculty in comparison with peers within the department and schools, along with market conditions, there is no mechanical alignment between the letter from the DH and the annual compensation letter issued by HR.