ADMINISTRATOR GUIDANCE FOR ANNUAL REVIEWS  
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The annual faculty review process this year should be approached with an eye toward the extraordinary challenges faculty have faced in the past year, both personally and professionally. Uncertainty, rapid change, and other challenges have had an impact, changed how faculty work, and diverted attention from “usual” tasks. Administrators are asked to consider these extraordinary factors in the annual review process.

The annual review process, per AC40 (Annual Evaluation of Faculty Performance), is conducted at the “local level” (coordinated by deans or chancellors; executed by department, school, division heads; DAAs; and CAOs), in accordance with procedures developed independently in each College. Evaluations are related to the individual faculty member’s areas of assignment and responsibility. Faculty submit written annual reports, are offered the opportunity to meet to discuss the review one-on-one with an administrative officer and are provided written documentation of the meeting separate from salary notification. The annual review is an important opportunity for faculty to receive regular feedback, reflect on performance, and identify growth areas.

Consistent with AC40, we ask that you approach the review as an opportunity to have a conversation with faculty members about their work in 2020, with the goal of determining how best to help the faculty member to be successful. Communicate awareness that the effects of the events of 2020 will vary considerably from faculty member to faculty member and on members of some groups, such as women and members of underrepresented groups. Provide faculty members with an OPTIONAL opportunity to contextualize their review (already incorporated into Activity Insight; see Faculty Guidance for Annual Reviews). Encourage faculty to weave the impact of events of 2020 into the narrative accompanying the annual review; describe the negative impact the pandemic and other challenges (e.g., societal/racial tension) have had on their work; and describe innovative or creative ways of surmounting obstacles. It is important to convey that this is not a requirement, as it is the faculty member’s decision to determine what to share about private personal situations.

When documenting the faculty member’s performance, consider changes in workload the faculty member may have experienced due to the pandemic, racial unrest, and political tension in 2020. The Faculty Guidance for Annual Reviews provides some examples of how events in 2020 may have had an impact on teaching and advising, research and creative accomplishments, and service. Also, changes were made to how teaching effectiveness is assessed (see Guidance on the Assessment of Teaching Effectiveness for more details). Please remember that if SRTE results are provided, the mean may not be calculated by either the administrative officer conducting the review or the faculty member. Focus on celebrating accomplishments during a difficult year. Emphasize behaviors consistent with success, rather than outcomes exclusively, and quality over quantity. While rare, concerning faculty behavior should be noted. Ratings of performance are not required per AC40; yet, units must find ways to differentiate among faculty members should there be a GSI program.

Unit leaders at all levels are encouraged to develop a creative and equitable approach to responding to the challenges faculty are facing. Engage unit faculty in a discussion of the
impact of events on 2020, determine and communicate priorities, and emphasize that there is not a “one size fits all” approach to addressing inequities. The goal here is to “level the playing field” to the extent possible. Be transparent about the allocation of limited resources. Engage faculty in a discussion of possible solutions which may include (but are not limited to) identifying a sponsor/mentor for each full-time faculty member considering promotion or tenure, discussing the possibility of an extension to the probationary period, altering committee assignments, modifying workload distributions, and ensuring candidates are acquainted with changes to the promotion and tenure process at the unit and university level.

As President Barron and Provost Jones have repeatedly stated, our people are Penn State’s greatest assets. These changes to the annual review process are intended to communicate to faculty appreciation for their efforts on behalf of the university and Penn State’s commitment to their success.