Office of the Provost, Towson University
3/14/2014

MERIT

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

Merit should only be awarded for performance that is over and above that required and expected as appropriate to the faculty role.

The rewards for meritorious performance should be equitable and consistent across the university, regardless of a faculty member’s department, college, or base salary.

Recognition and reward at the highest level (base merit +) should be limited to those whose performance is truly exceptional and exemplary.

MERIT ALLOCATIONS

A. Principles and practices regarding the allocation and distribution to FACULTY of April 2014 merit funds based on previously completed evaluations:

1. For the allocation in April 2014, base merit funds will be a standard flat-rate amount (x) for each merit-eligible faculty member. Accordingly, base merit dollars will be allocated according to the total number of merit-eligible faculty members from across the university. Faculty whose performance has been evaluated as Base merit + will receive
base merit \((x)\) plus an additional base merit+ increment \((y)\) in which \((y)\) will be no more than 5% of \((x)\). Base merit + \((y)\) dollars will also be allocated equally across the university. The end result will be that everyone with a base merit rating, regardless of their base salary, department or college will receive the same base merit amount. Base merit + distributions \([(y)\text{ dollars}]\) will depend upon the percentage of faculty within each college rated as base merit +.

Rationale: In the same way that promotion increments for advancement to Assoc. Professor and advancement to Full Professor are standard flat rates, regardless of base salary, so too should increments for Base Merit be a standard flat rates regardless of base salary. Merit should be independent of market-driven salaries.

2. Merit distributions for April 2014 will be based on the college merit evaluations from the past three years (2010-2012).

Rationale: Since merit has not been available for a number of years, and since there are inevitable ebbs and flows in the levels of faculty productivity over time, just one year of reviews is not the best measure of sustained meritorious work by faculty across multiple years. In addition, while not all April 2014 merit-eligible faculty have been reviewed for merit for each of the past three years, the majority of merit-eligible faculty have been reviewed over the past three years and thus, in the interests of fairness and the greater good of the greater number, allocations will be based on the best single annual evaluation from those undertaken over the past three years.

3. The difference in the standard dollar amounts distributed for Base Merit and Base Merit+ will be very small (no more than 5%) in order to minimize any structural disparities in the differing evaluation systems used in the individual colleges.

Rationale: In reviewing the outcomes of merit evaluations from the past three years as the basis for Merit distributions for April 2014, it was noted that, across colleges, the percentages of faculty evaluated as Base Merit + range from 28% (CLA) to 91% (COE) over the relevant (2010-2012) three year time period. Such disparities suggest different methods and models for
implementing the merit criteria across departments and colleges. As importantly, the literature on merit pay suggests that when merit increments are only distributed intermittently or, as in this case, for the first time after a sustained period without merit raises, it is generally deemed appropriate to limit the financial distinctions between levels of performance, and instead provide the merit distribution, to a significant degree, as an additional cost of living adjustment. Furthermore, in the interests of fairness and equity, as well as excellence, the obvious structural differences in evaluation systems across colleges suggest that differences in allocations between base merit and base merit + should be very limited (no more than 5%).

B. Issues regarding on-going FACULTY Merit evaluations.

4. Over the next 3-5 years, each college should move to a practice whereby no more than 30% of merit-eligible faculty should receive base merit + in merit evaluations. Accordingly, it is required that no more than 60% will receive base merit+ for work evaluated in AY 2015-16, no more than 50% in AY 2016-17, no more than 40% in AY 2017-18, and no more than 30% from AY 2018-19 onwards.

For merit awards based on Fall 2013 evaluations, merit distribution will be as follows:

Base merit (x) will be a standard amount (flat rate) across the university. Base merit + will be base merit (x) plus an additional increment (y) in which (y) will be no more than 30% of (x). The allocation of dollars for (y) will be by college and will be based upon 30% of the number of merit-eligible faculty in that college. Accordingly, the actual amount (y) distributed to those whose performance was rated as base merit + will be dependent upon that number. Thus the larger the number of faculty whose performance is rated as base merit + the lower the dollar award (y) per faculty member. Conversely, in colleges which recommend closer to 30% of faculty for base merit + those faculty will each receive a higher (y) amount. Those on year-long sabbatical leave will be assessed according to their assigned workload, supplemented as
necessary in the areas of teaching and/or service by additional information from their previous year’s merit evaluation.

Rationale: The goal of a merit system is to provide recognition of, and reward for, performance over and above the expectations attached to appropriate performance of the role of faculty. As a result of the obvious differences in evaluation systems across departments and colleges noted above, there is a need for a revision of the current system if that system is to ensure more equitable and standardized outcomes across colleges. Such a system should discriminate clearly between what is not meritorious performance, what is meritorious performance (merit), and what is truly exceptional (base+) performance.

Recognition and reward at the highest level should be limited to those whose performance is indeed truly exceptional. While a figure of 30% is somewhat arbitrary, there is some evidence in the literature that such a figure is appropriate in large organizations and there is also precedent on campus in that the College of Liberal Arts has used this criterion for a number of years. Being rewarded for truly exceptional performance only has meaning and value if it is not readily attainable by everyone. So while there may be departments in which, in any one year, more than 30% of the faculty may perform at levels that are truly exceptional, limiting truly exceptional evaluations to 30% of the faculty across a college helps maintain the value and meaning of the merit system.

Given that the 30% limit is a required college target to be reached by AY 2018-19, for AY 2014-2015, allocations for base merit + will be per college and as noted above for Fall 2013, in order to honor the system currently in place in each college and to allow further time for review of departmental criteria.

5. Merit committees must evaluate all candidates for merit on each of the three elements (teaching, scholarship, service) separately, as reflected in the new ballot form. Committee members are to provide a final composite rating (no merit, base merit, or base merit+) for each candidate, taking into account the percentage of effort assigned
to each category on the workload agreement of the faculty member being evaluated. If performance does not meet expectations for merit in any one category, then overall performance cannot be meritorious.

Rationale: Each of the three categories (teaching, scholarship, service,) carries requirements for expected performance and thus each should be evaluated for merit. However, an institution which prides itself on the quality of its teaching should expect excellence in that category as a necessary though not sufficient condition for merit.

C. Looking Ahead

6. While the current three-tier system of Merit evaluation (Not Meritorious, Satisfactory, and Excellent) will continue to be used, it is proposed that those evaluated as Not Meritorious be provided additional feedback, and receive supplementary support and guidance when deemed necessary.

   Not Meritorious:

   a) A faculty development plan will be required and mentoring will be provided

   b) A faculty development plan is recommended, mentoring will be available

   Satisfactory: (Performance is noteworthy and meets expectations) Base Merit

   Excellent: (Performance is truly exceptional) Base Merit +

7. In the interests of fairness and broad representation, it is desirable that, in future, departmental merit committees include representation from all TT ranks and clinical faculty members in the review of clinical faculty.

Rationale: The principles of inclusive shared governance and the value of senior faculty working with and mentoring junior faculty support the importance of broad representation in the merit process.