

Southwestern University
HR Policy Q & A: Performance Evaluations
January, 2006

Are you stressed-out because you have to complete Performance Evaluations on your staff? Would you rather get a root canal? You are not alone – but it really doesn't have to be that way! This Q&A focuses on the University's Performance Evaluation process, including pointers on how you can make the process more meaningful and a little less painful for you and your staff members. If some of the information contained in this Q&A seems familiar, it is because it is based on the Supervisory Training session we conducted on performance evaluations in 2002.

As always, please contact the Human Resources department if you have questions about any of our policies and practices.

Q: Why do we conduct Performance Evaluations?

A: Primarily to build and maintain positive, productive communications with staff members. The Performance Evaluation alone will not cause the relationship to grow – but, it is a tool supervisors can use to discipline themselves to take the necessary time and effort to reflect on each of their employees and how they might improve their relationships with them and enhance the employee's satisfaction in their job. After building this strong foundation, trust, honesty, and respect are more apt to follow. Other reasons to conduct Performance Evaluations include the following: 1) maintain regular documentation of an employee's job performance over time, which is useful for employment-related matters such as: raises, promotions, and performance management actions; 2) remain in compliance with SACS requirements; 3) retain focus on individual, departmental, and University goals; 4) provide a "roadmap" for the employee's development in the job.

Q: How many different types of Performance Evaluations does the University have?

A: There are currently six types of evaluations based on the various categories of employees: Administrative Management, Professional Staff, Professional Athletic Staff, Professional Librarians, Secretarial/Clerical Staff, and Physical Plant Staff.

Q: What is the annual timeline for evaluation completion?

A: After surveying all supervisors, the following annual schedule was adopted in 2003:

<u>Staff Category</u>	<u>Distribute Evaluations by:</u>	<u>Evaluations Completed by:</u>
Admin. Mgmt.	Mid-February	Mid-March
Prof. Staff	Early January	Early February
Prof. Ath. – Coaches		May
Prof. Ath. – Other		April
Prof. Librarians		April
Library Support Staff		April
Secretarial/Clerical	Mid-December	Late January
Physical Plant	Early January	Mid-February
Enrollment Svcs (all)	Late March	Late April

Q: What is the University’s official policy regarding staff evaluations?

A: The Staff Handbook states the following: “The University is committed to excellence in its operations and conducts regular performance evaluations for all employees. The performance evaluation process is intended to be a communication and development tool for supervisors and employees...Although each performance evaluation process is conducted on an annual basis, the University encourages employees and supervisors to discuss job performance and goals regularly throughout the year. All employee/staff performance evaluations are coordinated through the Human Resources department and require management review and approval...” [Staff Handbook Reference: Performance Evaluations, page 31]

Q: How were the performance evaluation forms developed?

A: As many of you will remember, we started the Performance Evaluation Development Project way back in 2001. We started by completing job analyses for all staff positions which we then used to develop job descriptions. Once that was completed, we determined which criteria would be important to evaluate within each staff category. There was also debate about the rating scale and the overall format of the evaluation form. Finally, evaluations were developed, distributed for comment, and ultimately finalized.

Q: What are the general instructions for completing Performance Evaluations?

A: The instructions are listed on the first page of the Performance Evaluation as follows:

Performance evaluations should be thorough, objective, factual, and cover the entire time period since the last appraisal. Care should be taken to avoid letting recent events or isolated incidents control the appraisal.

The evaluator should verbally review the University's Core Values with the employee, noting them as the basis for all activities and programs at Southwestern University.

It is very important to include specific comments at the end of each category, particularly if you have rated the individual as either superior or unsatisfactory on one or more of the criteria in that category.

Evaluators should complete and sign the evaluation form and review it with the employee (have the employee sign and date the form and provide written comments, if he/she desires). The evaluation should then be forwarded to the evaluator's supervisor for review and approval. Once this is accomplished, it should be sent to the Human Resources department for further processing.

Q: Because completing an evaluation can be very difficult, time-consuming, and uncomfortable – particularly if the employee being evaluated has areas in his/her performance that need improvement - can you suggest some rules or guidelines which will assist me during this process?

A: The following “Ten Commandments of Performance Appraisals” can help guide you through the process:

1. Be Honest.
2. Be Timely.
3. Be Consistent.
4. Be Objective.
5. Critique Behavior, Not Individuals.
6. Be Constructive.
7. Ask for Feedback.
8. Do Not Be a Therapist.
9. Keep Records.
10. Conduct Interim Reviews.

Q: Are there “guidelines” for applying the ratings?

A: The ratings are explained on the first page of the evaluation form as follows:

S Superior: Outstanding, consistently exceptional performance; on a par with the very best; far exceeds expectations; no deficiencies in this area.

E Exceeds Expectations: Above average performance; almost always exceeds standard requirements of the job; effective, solid, high quality work product.

M Meets Expectations: Satisfactory performance overall; consistently fulfills standard requirements of the job; adequate, acceptable work product.

N Needs Improvement: Marginal, below satisfactory performance; development required; results frequently fall short of expectations.

U Unsatisfactory: Unacceptable, poor performance; does not meet the minimum requirements of the job or expectations; immediate improvement required.

N/A Not Applicable: Did not observe or does not apply to this position.

It is important to keep in mind that “E” and “M” ratings are considered very good ratings, and that an “S” rating should be reserved for truly outstanding performance. If you rate an employee as either “N” or “U” in a particular area, you should have already discussed this with the employee during the course of the previous year. In other words, the employee should not be surprised by the “N” or “U” rating. Also, as noted in the general instructions, you should include written comments to accompany any “S” or “U” ratings. If there are numerous “N” and “U” ratings throughout the evaluation, then you should have begun a Performance Management process (i.e. verbal warning, written warning, probation, etc.) during the previous year. If not, you should contact the Human Resources department to formally begin that process.

Q: Do I complete the “goals” section of the evaluation prior to giving it to the employee to review?

A: In most cases, it is appropriate to leave that part of the evaluation blank and discuss goals with the employee when you meet with him/her to review the evaluation. Some supervisors provide a list of suggested goals for the employee to consider prior to the “face-to-face” meeting.

Q: Are there any guidelines about how to actually conduct the “face-to-face” evaluation meeting?

A: In conjunction with the “Ten Commandments” mentioned above, you should also keep the following in mind:

1. Encourage open and honest discussion.
2. Be prepared.
3. Actively listen to employee’s comments, including “body-language”
4. Avoid arguments or spending too much time on one item.
5. Reserve your opinions, and instead cite specific examples, experiences or incidents – be as objective as possible.
6. Keep the meeting on-track.
7. Balance positive and negative comments.
8. Focus on the job performance, not the person.
9. Ask the employee questions about what areas they believe they excel in and what areas they need to improve PRIOR to telling them what you think.
10. Be considerate when giving constructive criticism – share information rather than giving advice, focus your comments from the receiver’s point of view, and request the employee’s input about how to improve performance.
11. Keep the meeting confidential.
12. Be yourself.
13. End on a positive note.

Q: What do I do if an employee refuses to sign the evaluation form?

A: An employee should not be forced to sign the evaluation form. If he/she indicates that he/she does not want to sign it, let them know that you will make a note on the evaluation form saying that he/she refused to sign it, and then continue to process it according to the University’s guidelines. You should notify the Human Resources department so that appropriate next steps can be determined (i.e. meeting with the employee, supervisor, and Human Resources to discuss the evaluation).

Q: What do I do if an evaluation meeting starts to “go bad”?

A: Remember, you are in control of the meeting. If it’s not going well, you can stop the meeting by saying something like, “You know, our meeting is not going very well and I think it would be best if we concluded our meeting at this time and agreed to meet again in a day or two after we’ve both had time to reflect on the evaluation more.”

Q: Is it possible to get help completing evaluations?

A: Yes. If you have a particularly difficult evaluation to complete, please contact the Human Resources department to schedule an appointment to discuss it.

Q: What are some of the most common errors made when assigning ratings?

A: There are five basic errors that supervisors make when they are assigning ratings to the various criteria and categories within the evaluation:

1. “Halo Effect” – the tendency to rate the employee as “wonderful” in all categories. Generally, no areas of improvement are noted.
2. “Leniency, Softness, or Spinelessness” – the tendency to rate the employee higher than he/she really is in order to avoid a confrontation or incite conflict.
3. “Central Tendency” – the tendency to rate the employee as “meets expectations” on all or almost all of the categories.
4. “Prejudice and Partiality” – the tendency to take into consideration personal factors when assigning ratings – can be viewed as favoritism by others.
5. “Association” – the tendency to rate someone either higher or lower than his/her actual performance because of their relationship to someone else (i.e. related to an executive officer of the organization, friends with a “troublemaker”, etc.)

Remember that you are not doing yourself OR the employee any favors by not providing honest feedback regarding their performance. The idea is to help the employee to improve their performance (and, therefore their overall contribution to the University).

Supervisors sometimes will fall into one or more of these errors when they feel “hurried” to complete the evaluation. Taking adequate time to accurately complete each evaluation takes a concerted effort by the supervisor. The evaluation is important and warrants this level of attention.

Q: What are some general guidelines for writing comments within the evaluation?

A: Most importantly, avoid comments which could be viewed as discriminatory, especially those which make reference to protected categories under federal law - i.e. sex, race, color, religion, age, disability, national or ethnic origin, or any impermissible factor. Also, keep in mind that Southwestern’s Equal Employment Policy also includes nondiscrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

In addition, it is important to avoid the following:

- making overly personal comments (i.e. family issues, personal financial matters, etc.).
- making any statements about another employee’s performance within the evaluation – even former employees.
- stating salary information or making promises about raises, promotions, or other specific employment-related matters.
- using “always” and/or “never” to describe the employee’s performance.
- using derogatory language of any kind
- making jokes or ridiculing the employee or his/her performance in any way.

Below are some examples of inappropriate and appropriate comments:

INAPPROPRIATE	APPROPRIATE
Mary is very dependable despite being a single mom with three small children.	Although Mary has many outside activities to attend to, it does not affect her ability to complete her work assignments in a timely manner.
David never arrives to work on time and this must improve immediately.	David, on average, has been late to work two times per week during the past year. David and I have discussed this issue on several occasions, and although he has made sporadic improvement, he still has an excessive number of tardies. We have agreed that he must reduce the number of tardy arrivals to two times per month (preferably no occurrences) to avoid formal disciplinary action.
Joyce has experienced serious personal financial difficulties this year which have caused her to lose focus on her work.	Joyce's attention to detail declined this year and Joyce acknowledges that she needs to re-focus. In particular, I would like to see Joyce's performance return to her previous level when she would rarely make any grammatical errors.
Tom has only been in this position for 8 months, but already he has far exceeded the performance level of the previous incumbent, Joe Smith.	After being in the position for only 8 months, I am very pleased with Tom's overall performance in this job.
Due to Kim's outstanding performance on the Course Outline Project, I am recommending an above-average raise for her this year.	Kim's performance on the Course Outline Project was outstanding. As a key member of the project team, Kim was one of a very few individuals who received letters of commendation from the Provost.

INAPPROPRIATE	APPROPRIATE
<p>Over Marty’s three years of employment, I have explained how I want her to track my budget till I’m blue in the face! She still doesn’t get it!</p>	<p>Marty’s performance on tracking the department budget is unsatisfactory, even after giving her repeated and detailed instructions over the past three years. Marty is currently under a 30-day performance-based probation for this and other related matters.</p>
<p>Jerry’s outstanding performance these past six years puts him on-track for a promotion to a Director-level position.</p>	<p>Jerry has consistently exceeded expectations on all of his primary duties, and regularly goes “above and beyond” the call of duty on special projects.</p>
<p>Fernanda has been asked to participate in diversity initiatives because she is Hispanic.</p>	<p>Fernanda has been asked and she has agreed to participate in the University’s diversity initiatives due to her outstanding performance in her job these past eight years and the respect she has gained from her colleagues. I support her efforts in this important activity.</p>
<p>Even after 28 years of service, Murray is still sharp as a tack and keeps up with the newest technologies! Who says you can’t teach an old dog new tricks!</p>	<p>Murray’s performance continues to exceed expectations.</p>

INAPPROPRIATE	APPROPRIATE
<p>I am concerned that Robert's arthritis is worsening with age and may eventually keep him from performing the more physical tasks of his job.</p>	<p>A majority of Robert's job duties require physical stamina. Robert's performance on these duties has slowly declined over the past few years, primarily because Robert has resisted requesting assistance which is available to him and others in the department. Robert needs to resist the temptation to do a heavy task by himself because he doesn't want to take the additional time to wait for assistance. I also want Robert to attend the next available safety training session regarding lifting strategies.</p>
<p>Jenny is always on her cell phone with personal calls from her boyfriend. Her co-workers have complained to me about this and expect me to take action to correct the problem.</p>	<p>Jenny spends an excessive amount of time on personal phone calls during regular work hours. Her ability to complete her work and meet deadlines has been negatively affected and needs immediate improvement. It is a distraction in the work place. It has affected the ability for others in the area to perform their work, which has lowered the production level and morale of the department. Jenny must improve in this area by limiting her personal phone calls to no more than 2 per day for no more than 5 minutes per call and should attempt to make or receive the calls during break times.</p>