

Southwestern University HR Policy Q & A: Performance Evaluations

Are you stressed-out because you have to complete Performance Evaluations on your staff? 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 stressful for you and your staff members.

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:

- Build and maintain positive, productive communications with staff members.
- 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.
- Remain in compliance with SACSCOC requirements.
- Retain focus on individual, departmental, and University goals.
- Provide a "roadmap" for the employee's development in the job.

Q: What is the annual timeline for evaluation completion?

A: Evaluations are distributed to supervisors early spring and are due back by the end of April. This allows adequate time for the supervisors to maneuver around peak-times in the department. Remember this is an evaluation of the previous year, delaying the review blurs the time being evaluated with the current year.

Q: What if this is not a good time for my department to complete these evaluations?

A: While there is not going to be a 'perfect' time for all departments across campus, this was the time-frame that was approved by the President's Staff. The information provided in the evaluation process is used as part of the salary review process that begins in May.

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: 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 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 discussed this situation with your Supervisor. If you haven't already, it may be appropriate to talk with the Human Resources department about starting a Performance Management process (i.e. verbal warning, written warning, probation, etc.).

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, or ask for suggested goals from the employee to discuss, prior to the “face-to-face” meeting.

Q: What do I do if an employee does not want to sign the evaluation form?

A: An employee should not be forced to sign the evaluation form. If he/she indicates that they do not want to sign it, let them know that you will make a note on the evaluation form saying that he/she declined 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: Can the employee add their own comments?

A: Yes. The employee can write on the last page or can attach a page to the evaluation with their comments. It will be included in their personnel file.

Q: Is it possible to get help completing evaluations?

A: Yes. If you have a particularly difficult evaluation to complete, you can receive guidance from your direct supervisor or contact the Human Resources department to schedule an appointment to discuss it.

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 and those which are noted in the University's Equal Employment opportunity statement; including sex, race, religion, age, disability, national or ethnic origin, sexual orientation, gender identity/transgender status, or any impermissible factor.

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