

University-Wide P&A Employees' Advocacy Plan

Approved February 1, 2013 by the P&A Senate

The University of Minnesota has expressed a strong commitment to recruit, mentor, reward, and retain world-class faculty and staff, including Professional and Administrative (P&A) employees.

P&A employees at the University are represented by the Academic Professionals and Administrators Senate (P&A Senate) – a governance body made up of elected representatives from all units on the UMC, UMD, UMM, UMR, and UMTC campuses. The P&A Senate is supported by the University Senate Office, which organizes monthly meetings; takes and distributes meeting minutes; provides support for P&A Senate subcommittees; maintains the P&A Senate website and membership database; provides financial support for the P&A Senate annual orientation retreat and travel and teleconferencing for representatives on coordinate campuses; and organizes unit-level P&A groups and their elections. This support from the University Senate Office is limited to the P&A Senate governance body and does not extend to constituents.

The P&A Senate plays an important role for its constituents and proposes ongoing University-wide mechanisms to support and advocate for all employees in the P&A job class. To continue delivering creative, innovative, and emerging service to the University, P&A employees have collectively identified action items that are important to them. These include:

- 1) Job security similar to that of other non-faculty employees,
- 2) Equal waiting period for retirement benefits enjoyed by all other employee groups,
- 3) Targeted orientation programs for new employees,
- 4) Clear career paths and promotional opportunities,
- 5) Professional development opportunities that are comprehensive and widely available, and
- 6) Recognition of P&A efforts and accomplishments.

Job Security Similar to That of Other, Non-Faculty Employees

Any lay off or non-renewal of appointment at the University should be based on some cause. Civil Service employees, for example, may be laid off “because of abolition of position; shortage of work or funds; reorganization of the administrative, collegiate, departmental unit; or other reasons beyond the employee's control that do not reflect discredit on the employee's services” (Civil Service Rule 12.3.1.1 “*Layoffs*”). P&A employees, however, can be non-renewed without an explicit reason or justification. The *Administrative Policy on Non-Renewal of Appointment for Academic Professional and Administrative Employees* states that “non-renewal of appointment may be based on no reason or any reason which does not violate the legal rights of the P&A employee. It is not a dismissal for cause.”

The ability of units to non-renew P&A employees at any time with no justification creates distrust between P&A employees and their supervisors. P&A employees do not enjoy a sense of job security when they can be non-renewed at a supervisor's whim. The policy allowing non-renewal with no cause also may have a chilling effect on P&A employees' exercise of their right to academic freedom.

The P&A Senate recommends that the non-renewal policy be changed so that non-renewed P&A employees must be told explicitly in the non-renewal notice why the decision to non-renew was made. Changing this policy can be done at no cost to the University.

Equal Waiting Period for Retirement Benefits Enjoyed by All Other Employee Groups

P&A employees are the only employee group at the University who are subject to a waiting period for retirement benefits after being hired. Both the MSRS plan for Civil Service and Labor Represented employees, and the Faculty Retirement Plan for eligible faculty begin on the first day of employment without regard to salary level. P&A employees who meet percent-time eligibility requirements for the Faculty Retirement Plan, but who make a salary of less than \$45,863 per year with a 12-month appointment (\$37,800 with 9-month appointment) must wait three years for retirement benefits to begin. P&A employees with a 12-month salary of \$45,863 - \$54,135 (\$37,800 - \$46,132 for 9-month appointments) must wait two years for retirement benefits to begin. Eligible P&A employees making over \$54,135 (\$46,132 for 9-month appointments) have the waiting period waived.

Benefit policies of this type are inequitable when not consistently applied across employee groups. Additionally, this policy affects the lowest paid P&A employees most, since the lowest paid P&As experience the longest delay in retirement benefit contributions. The P&A Senate strongly recommends to both central administration and the Retirement Subcommittee of the Senate Committee on Faculty Affairs that this inequitable policy be revisited and eliminated without delay.

Targeted Orientation Programs

The P&A Senate recommends that new P&A employees be provided with a targeted orientation program similar to the 3-day New Faculty Orientation held annually for all new tenure-track faculty. The existing faculty 3-day orientation provides exposure to the structure and organization of the University, access to teaching resources, discussion of research administration rules, and career-path mentoring for faculty. P&A employees should attend a similar orientation with teaching, research, and/or administrative tracks, so that individual P&A could attend those sessions that best relate to their own jobs. Faculty members are typically

not on payroll at the time of orientation, and are paid a stipend to attend. The majority of P&A employees are on a 12-month appointment and would not require a stipend.

While a P&A-specific orientation is being developed, the P&A Senate recommends that applicable portions of the New Faculty Orientation be recorded and made available online for review by P&A employees.

Another concrete step toward a welcoming environment is the creation of a dedicated P&A email address (e.g., NewP&A@umn.edu) for new P&A employees. The email sent to the address could be answered by P&A Senate volunteers, who could direct new P&A employees to helpful resources at the University. Such an address exists now for new faculty as a means of providing quick answers to whatever questions are on their minds.

Clear Career Paths and Promotional Opportunities

It is easier to retain valuable employees when there are opportunities for those employees to grow and develop in their careers and to move up in the workplace. The University must provide a clear structure for career progression in P&A job classes that includes consistent, clear job titles and duties, easily understood career tracks, and salary ranges that are based on the internal and external employment markets. Creating this structure would help facilitate P&A employee transfers across the University and would allow the University to better describe to constituents the work that P&A employees do and the role that P&As play.

Career progression and wider opportunity for advancement are values of the Job Family Project, which the Office of Human Resources (OHR) is now implementing. OHR has completed work on three pilot job families in the last four years of the Job Family Project, with a fourth job family expected to be completed by the end of calendar year 2012. To date, thirteen additional job families remain to be classified. OHR is working with an outside consultant to determine how the remaining Job Family Project work can be done quickly and effectively. The P&A Senate urges OHR to complete this work as quickly as possible.

Professional Development Opportunities

P&A employees require professional development opportunities to advance and enhance their skills. Creating a central portal to on-campus staff development opportunities would be valuable for all of the U's employees. The Office of Human Resources might be ideally suited to collect and disseminate such a list of opportunities and to make links available on its website.

The P&A Senate is disheartened to note that two key development opportunities for P&A employees have been put on hold or discontinued. The President's Emerging Leaders program

(PEL), which has provided a leadership growth opportunity for mid-level P&A and Civil Service/Bargaining Unit employees since 2001, is on indefinite hiatus by the Office of Human Resources. Additionally, an in-depth project management and process improvement training opportunity that was available to PEL graduates, the Transformational Leadership Program, was discontinued when the Office of Service and Continuous Improvement was disbanded several years ago.

The P&A Senate recommends that appropriate administrative offices reconstitute these important leadership and development opportunities or something similar.

Recognition of Efforts

When outstanding employees are recognized with University awards, the University demonstrates that it honors and rewards internal excellence.

University faculty and staff regularly attain prizes, awards, and honors from external organizations. For faculty, news of accomplishments and honors is often communicated by departments and colleges, as well as by the Office of the Vice Provost for Faculty & Academic Affairs (in *Brief*, on web sites, and on the Scholars Walk). P&A accomplishments are rarely publicly celebrated in the same way. The P&A Senate encourages all colleges, departments, and central administration to publicize honors earned by P&A employees in a manner similar to that of faculty. It also encourages the University to begin changing the culture so that P&As are nominated more frequently, thus bringing honor to the University and P&As by winning national and international awards.

P&A employees bring a range of talents and expertise to the University and are an invaluable resource for sharing information and engaging in public conversations. A wonderful example of calling upon the P&A employee knowledge base was including P&A panelists recently on the University Senate's Centennial Event. Along these lines, the Senate encourages development of a P&A lecture series throughout the academic year on timely and relevant topics.

Supporting P&A employees in targeted and concrete ways puts the University in an excellent position to achieve its recruitment, retention, and recognition goals. By supporting P&As in the ways listed in this document, the University of Minnesota will better realize its ideals as a premier place for all its employees to work, learn and engage.