

Professional Support for University of Wyoming Academic Personnel Assigned to Locations Off the UW-Laramie Campus

Purpose: The purpose of this policy statement on Professional Support for University of Wyoming Faculty and Academic Professionals Assigned to Locations Off the UW-Laramie Campus is to recognize the reality of increasing numbers of UW academic personnel assigned outside UW-Laramie, enhance awareness of the need to effectively support these academic personnel in their university careers in serving UW and the state, and provide examples of effective practice in supporting UW academic personnel assigned outside the UW-Laramie campus.

Policy Principles. There are four principles that serve as the foundation of this policy statement:

- **Statewide mission.** As Wyoming's only university, and as part of its land grant mission, the University of Wyoming has a statewide mission of teaching, research, and service.
- **Rigorous performance standards.** Faculty and academic professionals should be held to the same high standards of performance in teaching, research, and service, regardless of the location of their assignment.
- **Variation in faculty roles and job descriptions.** Job descriptions and faculty roles vary, according to the assignments of faculty, regardless of the physical location of the individuals. Thus, the assignment of UW faculty to off-campus locations may vary from traditional academic roles on the Laramie campus in order to meet the needs of the University in different communities.
- **Equitable treatment.** Departments and colleges should actively ensure that their colleagues assigned off-campus are treated equitably by being included in the work of the department, the college, and the University: participation in department and college meetings, committees, and decision-making; support for travel and research; assignment of graduate students (if applicable); mentoring; and support for professional activities and development.

These principles are discussed in more detail below.

Statewide university mission. The University of Wyoming mission statement includes a focus on the institution's statewide mission: *As Wyoming's only university, we are committed to outreach and service that extend our human talent and technological capacity to serve the people in our communities, our state, the nation, and the world.* This commitment is met through Agricultural Extension, Student Educational Opportunity grants, Small Business Development Centers, and the statewide delivery of academic courses and degree programs (as well as Wyoming Public Media programs) through the Outreach School.

This statewide institutional commitment has been articulated for nearly a century. Two examples suffice:

- The 1914 University Bulletin stated “The University of Wyoming wishes to meet the educational needs of the people of Wyoming in all feasible ways. The services of the faculty, the resources of the libraries and laboratories, should be made available not merely for the young people who come to its campus, but also for the citizens in their homes throughout the State.”
- In his 2011 Fall Convocation Speech, President Tom Buchanan said “We will continue to take UW out in the state, and we will continue to improve our outreach programs. We will absolutely be more aggressive in these efforts, both on-site and on-line. The University of Wyoming has an obligation to do so.” President Buchanan has simplified this commitment by noting: “We are the University of *Wyoming*, not the University of *Laramie*.”

Rigorous performance standards. The foundation of the excellence of the University of Wyoming is its human talent, and the very best human resources must be recruited and retained for the university to achieve its statewide mission. Critical to the maintenance and development of the institution’s human resources is a performance appraisal process that is clear and equitable for all university employees, wherever they live and work. For academic personnel, professional support and the promise of advancement in rank should not be influenced by whether they are located on or off the UW-Laramie campus. In addition, the work of UW academic personnel assigned off the main campus must not be perceived as being of lesser value because the job description is different from those of Laramie-based colleagues in the same program or department. Rather, it must be understood that academic personnel job descriptions are developed to meet the goals of the University and its academic programs. The evaluation of the professional success of academic employees should be based on individual job descriptions, and occur within the context of the environment in which the employees work and the contributions they make to the institution’s mission in serving the state.

It is not in the interests of the university or the state for academic personnel assigned outside the Laramie campus to be seen as being of a lesser quality or doing work that is not as rigorous as their colleagues in Laramie. Ultimately, this would result in a perception that degrees attained through the coursework of academic colleges, delivered through Outreach, are of a lesser quality; it would undermine support on the main campus for Outreach-based initiatives and program delivery; and it could lead some across the state to question UW’s commitment to its mission as a land-grant institution. Hence, it is important that department, college, and university standards for recruitment, retention, tenure, reappointment, and promotion remain operative for all academic personnel, regardless of their location.

Variation in faculty roles and job descriptions. The third principle, variation in roles and job descriptions, emphasizes that it is important for members of the university, including at the college and department levels, to recognize that job descriptions and faculty roles may vary as a result of assignments, including location (e.g., assigned to a site outside UW-Laramie) and teaching modality (e.g., primarily teaching through Outreach). Therefore, job descriptions must be carefully crafted and regularly reviewed to ensure that all persons involved agree that the job description accurately reflects the

responsibilities and activities of the individual. In addition, departments, colleges and off-campus personnel should develop and agree on assessment criteria to avoid complications during retention, promotion, and tenure reviews. The department chair must play a critical role in helping department colleagues understand the reasons for differences in job descriptions and expectations. Responding appropriately to these differences and minimizing impacts often requires flexibility, willingness by all to work *via* technology (e.g., academic personnel assigned outside the UW-Laramie campus should not be required to travel to Laramie for departmental interactions), and an understanding of the importance of context. A review of the aspects of faculty job requirements will help to clarify this.

Research: As is the case for all UW tenure-track faculty, non-Laramie-based faculty are likely to have a percentage of their work allocated to research and creative activity. Depending on the environment in which the individual works, the percentage allocated to and the expectations for the evidence of scholarly success will vary. For example, faculty assigned to community college locations may have reduced research loads. They may also have limited access to graduate students, immediate access to many of the university's research resources, and direct and daily contact with colleagues active in research in their specific field. In some disciplines this may constrain some scholarly activity, but it should not lead to the assumption that meaningful scholarly work cannot be accomplished by off-campus faculty. Thus, it is critical that the department (including the head and individual department faculty) work with the faculty assigned to off-campus sites to provide every reasonable support for the development and sustainability of faculty research programs. In addition, the off-campus faculty member and his or her department should actively identify and discuss constraints, consider them in developing the job description, and develop achievable scholarly goals for retention, promotion, and tenure. The use of modern distance technologies (e.g., video conferencing or web conferencing) should be actively considered to help mitigate some of the effects of geographic isolation.

Teaching: The teaching load and expectations of off-campus faculty may vary from UW-Laramie faculty. Faculty assigned off the Laramie campus are likely to have a larger teaching load and more of their load dedicated to distance teaching. This adds to the necessity for carefully crafted job descriptions and regular discussions with department and college colleagues so there is clarity regarding teaching expectations, including an understanding of some of the unique demands of distance teaching.

Service: Even though academic personnel assigned outside the UW-Laramie campus are full members of UW academic departments, their inclusion on departmental and college committees can be perceived as problematic logistically. Including a colleague located half a state away can create the perception that meetings will be difficult to schedule, and that meaningful conversations cannot be conducted. Being out of sight may result in being out of mind, which can mean that invitations and communications are not extended to off-campus personnel and those personnel are excluded from committee or departmental conversations. Given these tendencies, it will be important for academic personnel assigned off-campus, and for their department chairs and deans, to remember

the university technology available to enhance effective communications and facilitate interactions across the state.

Service takes a variety of forms. For example, UW personnel assigned to a UW location on a community college campus may be asked to serve on that institution's committees (e.g., curriculum or faculty search committees). These faculty may carry the added burden of being the only possible University representative with expertise in a particular discipline who can serve on committees important to UW and the community college or community. Hence service to community colleges and local communities should be considered university service. Such service benefits the university and helps solidify the university's connections with these important partners, the focus of UW's Strategic Partnerships Initiative.

In addition, academic personnel assigned outside the UW-Laramie campus should have access to the full university career ladder, including opportunities to serve in institutional leadership roles. However, because of the nature of some appointments and off-campus locations, local leadership roles should also be taken into account. For example, a College of Education faculty member serving on a local public school steering team tasked with reshaping the school district's curriculum is engaged in an important type of leadership.

Equitable treatment. The fourth principle follows from recognition that the success of academic personnel is based on resources and relationships. Thus, departments and colleges should provide equitable treatment for all academic personnel. [Note: Equitable does not always mean the same; different circumstances may require different supports.] This will necessitate including off-campus personnel in the allocation of support for teaching, research, and service, including mentoring, research collaboration, professional development, and travel. It will also necessitate the effort to include off-campus faculty in department meetings and retreats, research presentations, and tenure and promotion decisions.

UW academic personnel assigned outside the UW-Laramie campus must be fully aware of the challenges that they will face based on their geographical separation from their on-campus colleagues. And they must be willing to commit to the efforts necessary to be involved in the operations of their departments, colleges, and the university. However, building quality relationships is not the sole responsibility of off-campus personnel; it is important for everyone at the university to attend to the development of meaningful and supportive relationships for faculty in Laramie and outside the UW-Laramie campus. This is a shared responsibility, and modern communication technologies make these connections much easier and more viable.

Conclusion. As the only publicly funded baccalaureate and graduate degree granting institution in Wyoming, the University of Wyoming bears a significant responsibility to attend to the educational and research needs and expectations of Wyoming constituents. Throughout its history UW has addressed this by allocating resources, including personnel, in different locations throughout the state for academic, research, service and

extension purposes. Attention to the four policy principles discussed above should provide a framework for ensuring academic personnel assigned to off-campus locations have access to the same career opportunities as UW-Laramie personnel, including clear and equitable performance expectations that recognize the varied responsibilities assigned to UW academic personnel across the state.

There are excellent examples of UW colleges and departments providing effective professional support for off-campus academic personnel that can serve as models for other departments. These programs integrate a variety of approaches to create department cultures that are inclusive and supportive, utilize technology to enhance connections, recognize and appreciate diverse professional activities, and provide resources for professional development. Some of these examples are documented in the appendix to this document. However, opportunities to share approaches should be created to enhance the professional experience for UW academic personnel wherever they are assigned.

APPENDIX

Examples of Good Practice: Including and Supporting UW Academic Personnel Assigned Outside the UW-Laramie Campus

School of Nursing support for academic personnel, regardless of location. The UW School of Nursing utilizes a variety of mechanisms for professional development of academic personal, including those assigned off-campus, in order to enhance their success. Professional development is available to any new faculty placed at community college sites. Efforts to integrate all academic personnel, support their professional success, and thus enhance student learning and School of Nursing effectiveness, include the following:

- New academic personnel participate in an orientation program with sessions 1-2 times each month throughout the fall semester.
- All new academic personnel are assigned mentors.
- The School of Nursing holds an all-school annual retreat in August at the beginning of the fall semester.
- Program retreats are also held as needed.
- Program meetings are held weekly to monthly depending on the program and these are all done through phone/OVN/Skype.
- The School of Nursing holds monthly “Lunchbox” sessions featuring speakers focused on teaching and/or research.
- The School also offers “Teaching Interest Groups” that address a teaching interest, such as managing on-line threaded discussions.
- Faculty are encouraged to participate in a variety of ECTL activities.

College of Education support for academic personnel, regardless of location. All CoEd faculty have their positions assigned to one of the four academic departments in the College. So each faculty member knows that their annual review, their reviews for promotion, their access to support funding, and their faculty status in the College are subject to exactly the same policies and procedures as for faculty based on the Laramie campus.

- Departments are able to establish a collaborative culture for all the disciplinary faculty by expecting participation in departmental faculty meetings, feedback on departmental issues/ideas, and access to THEIR department head, associate deans, and dean just as all faculty in the College. These faculty serve on departmental, College, and UW governance committees.
- All faculty are eligible for faculty awards according to criteria that have no relation to place of assignment.
- Off-campus faculty are invited to participate in all CoEd events, including retreats, college-wide meetings, and celebrations.

- Sometimes participation is by phone, sometimes by video, and sometimes by travel. The outlying unit and the College share support for travel costs when distance participation is not appropriate.
- We do everything we can to create as few distinguishing characteristics as possible for non-Laramie-based faculty...and we are always open to additional suggestions.