

# Survey on Annual Performance Evaluation

Unclassified Professional Staff

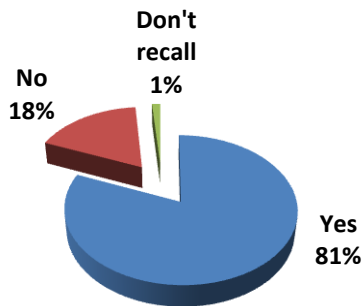
Spring 2008

On February 13, 2008, an e-mail was sent to unclassified professional staff with information about merit increases and performance evaluation, including links to these official KU policies. The e-mail included a four question online survey about performance evaluation. The following is a summary of the results of the online survey.

**Responses:** We received 373 responses which represents 20% of the unclassified professional staff at the time of the survey (373/1885). This is a good response rate for a survey of this type and should allow us some confidence in this information.

## Question #1

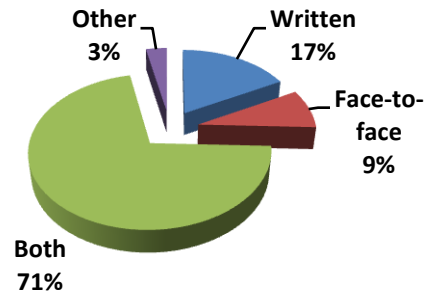
If you have been employed at KU at least one year, did you receive a formal evaluation in the past year?



373 responses

## Question #2

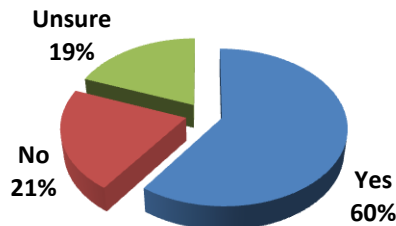
If you responded yes to question #1, what form did the evaluation take?



299 responses

## Question #3

Were you satisfied with the evaluation process?



346 responses

#### Question #4

Do you have any comments/questions about the evaluation process?

The following is an analysis of open-ended responses to this last question. About 45% of those who took the survey provided comments or questions (167/373). The following analysis helps us understand the views of those who left comments, but does not reflect the views of all staff members who completed the survey. While about 60% of the participants reported that they were satisfied with the evaluation process (Question 3), a sizable majority of the comments reported here reflect dissatisfaction. The analysis will help us address the concerns of the 40% that did not report satisfaction with the process.

The 167 responses were analyzed and grouped into topical areas. The top five topical areas are presented below. These five areas reflect about 90% of the responses. Quotes that illustrate the general viewpoint from the topical area are included. Quotes were chosen only if anonymity could be assured. The topical areas are listed in order, starting with the most endorsed area.

#### Topical Areas

##### **1. The current evaluation process is not helpful or no evaluation is completed.**

Almost 35% of the comments were made about this issue. Some staff reported that they had never received an evaluation after lengthy employment at KU. Others reported that they received merit increases so they assumed an evaluation was completed; however, there was no face-to-face meeting and no written documentation was provided. Of those who received an evaluation, many commented that the evaluation did not provide useful information that impacted their performance. A few staff recommended changes to the procedure to include more objective, measurable outcomes personalized to the employee. A few staff recommended implementation of a 360 degree multi-rater evaluation process that includes feedback from supervisors, supervisees, and peers.

*"I have been an unclassified employee at KU for [many] years and in all that time have never had a written evaluation. Only in the last five years have I even had face-to-face evaluations, and that basically takes the form of asking me how things are going and a slap on the back. There is nothing constructive about it."*

*"In the past, we were required to fill out an extensive form at year's end, describing our accomplishments and goals for the next year, but it was never mentioned again and no formal review ever took place."*

##### **2. Evaluation procedures are unclear. More specific policies and procedures are needed and staff should be made aware of these in some formal fashion.**

Much confusion was expressed about basic issues, such when annual evaluations are completed, which supervisor should complete the evaluation, and whom to contact with questions about the procedures. Almost 20% of the comments were made about this issue. The evaluation process for unclassified staff is decentralized, with each department or school

setting their own policy. The University mandates an annual written performance evaluation. Many staff and supervisors are not aware of the University requirement or their departmental procedures. Some staff reported that the process for university support staff was much more structured and suggested that greater oversight from KU Department of Human Resources was needed for unclassified staff. Concerns also were noted about the promotion process for unclassified staff. Several staff reported that the process is unclear and job descriptions are rarely reviewed or updated.

*“I don’t know who exactly is responsible for my evaluation...I feel very lost and confused when it comes to the evaluation process.”*

*“The current evaluation process is woefully deficient...I have never worked for a company that did not have a clearly articulated job description from which a clear set of performance criteria were derived in order to determine if my performance was meeting or not meeting the expectations of the company.”*

### **3. The current performance evaluation process is working well.**

About 17% of the comments reflected satisfaction with the current evaluation process. These staff reported that performance evaluation in their offices was beneficial and the resulting feedback was helpful. Several staff members reported that the annual evaluation worked best when it was just one aspect of a pattern of regular feedback throughout the year.

*“My supervisor has always performed evaluations in a very informative and caring fashion. There is ample time for two-way communication. I always come away with information that can help me grow professionally and personally.”*

*“Our division does an excellent job with evaluation, although we have worked, as a team, on perfecting the process for many years. I believe our division is unique in its commitment to continuous evaluation and feedback. It’s something of which we can be proud.”*

### **4. Supervisors are in need of training on conducting an effective annual evaluation, as well as how to give good feedback throughout the year.**

This was a sentiment expressed in about 12% of the comments and extends beyond the annual evaluation. Staff generally asked for greater communication and clearer expectations, including regular check-ins throughout the year. Many staff reported that they would be open to making changes in their performance if they knew what their supervisor wanted. Several staff reported that they appreciate their supervisor’s assistance in goal setting and future planning during the annual evaluation, versus just a review of the past year. Staff also asked for the chance to evaluate their supervisors and others up the chain of command.

*“I want a real probing discussion of what I am doing well, what I may be able to improve and how, and some input throughout the year instead of a one-off interview merely to fulfill the formality of the requirement to my supervisor’s supervisor.”*

*“If reciprocal feedback is considered a valued part of the evaluation process, it is only lip service unless KU reduces the risk to the employee. How about a system of employee evaluations of managers, such as the anonymous course evaluations provided in KU classes?”*

## **5. The merit pool isn't working as intended.**

Comments about merit comprised about 7% of the total. Some staff reported that raises are not based on merit in their department/office, as everyone gets the same increase. Others reported that when implemented according to policy, there is little difference between those who receive the top merit increase and those at the bottom of the scale. Given this, the merit pool doesn't effectively differentiate top performers from others. A few staff reported that they did not like the merit concept and wanted, at the least, to be assured of the state-approved raise.

*“Evaluation process is okay – what isn't okay is that where I work the ‘department’ gets a pool of money for increases and if they give someone a bigger than recommended increase, the rest get smaller than the recommended increase regardless of how well they performed the past year.”*

*“Departments are left with little flexibility to actually reward based on merit. The process has become a series of hoops to go through in hopes of receiving enough merit to cover the increase in cost of living.”*

## **Summary**

Of the unclassified professional staff who responded to this survey, most (81%) reported that they received a formal performance evaluation in the last year. Of those that received an evaluation, almost 60% reported that they were satisfied with the evaluation process. About 45% of the survey participants chose to provide comments and expressed a range of opinions about the evaluation process. Most of the comments were critical in nature; however, this is not an unusual response pattern to an open-ended question that does not capture responses from all participants. The comments on a whole were well thought out and help provide a greater understanding of both the strengths and weaknesses of the current annual performance evaluation policy and procedures for unclassified staff.

## **Action Steps**

The Unclassified Senate will work to address the issues raised in this report. The Governance and Representation Committee will be responsible for continued work on issues of performance evaluation and merit increases. Updates on progress will be provided on the Unclassified Senate web site – <http://www.unclassifiedsenate.ku.edu/~unsenate/committees/uscomm.shtml>

The first step in this process has already been taken. Committee members met with Ola Faucher, Director of the KU Department of Human Resources and Equal Opportunity (HR/EO), on June 2, 2008. Initial plans discussed in this meeting include:

1. To address clarity about the basic expectations in the evaluation and merit processes.
  - We propose that an e-mail be sent out by HR/EO in January/February to cue the start of the evaluation process with links to KU policies and procedures, date evaluations should be completed, etc. This e-mail would go out to all unclassified professional staff, deans/department heads, and personal-related staff in the school/department. There would be an expectation that the e-mail would be disseminated to all supervisors of unclassified professional staff. HR/EO has agreed to seek approval from the provost's office for this action.
  - HR/EO will develop a frequently asked questions (FAQ) document about performance evaluation and merit that will cover basic tenets of these processes and address specific questions raised in the survey.
  - HR/EO will present a brown bag about the evaluation and merit process for unclassified professional staff early in the fall semester.
  - HR/EO is available to any school or department that would like assistance in developing or revising their evaluation process.
2. Also to increase clarity, we propose the development of a repository that would house evaluation policies and procedures for unclassified professional staff, specific to the school/department/office. This would include the name of the pertinent personnel-related staff to contact for more information, a copy of the evaluation tool(s) used, and a description of how merit is calculated. We will start by asking for voluntary submissions. Eventually it is hoped that each school/department/office will submit its evaluation plan for inclusion in this repository. The process would still be decentralized, but information would be readily accessible.
3. To address the need for supervisor training, HR/EO is willing to develop a course that will be scheduled at the beginning of the evaluation period (approximately January). HR/EO is also available to "take the show on the road" and come to school/departmental meetings as time permits to present on effective evaluations.

If these steps do not adequately address concerns, HR/EO has agreed to work with the Unclassified Senate on other potential solutions.

Additional performance evaluation issues to be explored or addressed by the Unclassified Senate Governance and Representation Committee include:

- A procedure to evaluate supervisors
- Development of a promotion process
- Facilitation of job description updates

*The survey was conducted by the Governance and Representation Committee of the Unclassified Senate (Chair Phil Wilke). This report was submitted on June 6, 2008 by Susan Corrigan, with assistance from Ian Cahir.*