

**STANDARDS
OF GOOD PRACTICE
IN THE EMPLOYMENT OF
PROFESSIONAL STAFF
IN HIGHER EDUCATION**



**EMPOWERMENT
& VOICE**



A Union of Professionals

AFT Higher Education

AFT HIGHER EDUCATION

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Summary of Standards of Good Practice

ESTABLISHING STANDARDS FOR PROCEDURES AND REQUIREMENTS

1. Professional staff should be guaranteed a voice in decision-making through a strong, open and cooperative partnership with university administration.
2. Professional staff hiring-based on procedures mutually agreed upon by administration and professional staff representatives-should include an in-person interview and an open hiring process. The interview process should be conducted at the departmental or equivalent level, with participation of professional staff on search committees, and recommendations made to the college or university for final decision.
3. At the point of hiring, professional staff should be given a current and accurate position description that has been reviewed and approved by both the college and its professional staff. Position descriptions should be developed by the individual departments, including the professional staff serving in those departments, in consultation with the human resource or personnel department on campus. They should be up-to-date with defined expectations, workload requirements, time allotment rules, and skill requirements.
4. A clear performance evaluation system should be established based on current and accurate job descriptions. Evaluation should include discussions of working conditions, professional development, promotion opportunities and other key elements of the position.
5. After completing a probationary period, professional staff are entitled to job security. After an employee completes the probationary period, an assessment committee should review his or her performance and make recommendations. The employee should be

issued a multi-year contract or given time for remediation. At a minimum, professional staff should have a comparable tenure-style due process system with long-term contracts, adequate notice of nonrenewal, seniority ranking, and the freedom to challenge management without sanctions.

6. Professional staff should have a clearly defined work schedule-based on procedures mutually agreed upon by administration and professional staff representatives-with options for comp time or flex time. Once defined, a system should be set up to handle necessary compensation and concessions to those encountering "on-call" requirements, night work and other overtime hours.
7. If professional staff members' job responsibilities change substantially, they should be able to apply for a position reclassification review.
8. An appeals process should be openly available to professional staff to handle any disputes, ranging from promotions to denial of reappointment. A clearly defined and fair appeals process should be set up to handle any employment disputes and guarantee due process.

SETTING STANDARDS FOR COMPENSATION

1. Professional staff should have a fair and equitable salary classification structure for each job title based on procedures mutually agreed upon by administration and professional staff representatives. To recognize their many different duties and levels of responsibility, an institution should clearly define its classification and salary system for the variety of job titles. The salary structure should be based on years of experience and include provisions such as negotiated minimum salaries, advancement steps and salary ranks.

2. Professional staff should receive paid sick leave, paid holidays and breaks, health and pension benefits, and any other benefits necessary, comparable to those of faculty.
3. Funds should be designated for professional development and training. Professional staff should also have access to tuition waivers, travel allowances, and financial support for conferences and other relevant programs.
4. Professional staff should have the option of sabbaticals or education leaves, as determined by a sabbaticals committee. Professional staff members who are excused from their regular duties to attend work-related training should not be required to make up the time missed. Sabbatical committees that review requests for leave must include professional staff selected by peers.
5. Professional staff should be considered for promotions or salary increases based on professional development, supplemental education and years of experience. Criteria for promotions should focus on, but not be limited to, professional development, years of service to the college or department, and quality of work. A clear procedure should exist for applying for promotions.
6. Notice of vacancies and the process for filling vacancies must be public and transparent. A system should be in place for notice of all promotion opportunities. Professional staff should receive a timely and complete response from supervisors following any request for a promotion. Colleges and universities should follow previously defined procedures for determining whether professional staff members meet the criteria for promotions.

PROMOTING STANDARDS FOR PROFESSIONAL RESPECT AND SUPPORT

1. Professional staff must have representation with full voting privileges on academic and institutional governing boards. Considering the multiple roles professional staff fill and their unique perspectives on students' needs, slots should be reserved for them on governing and planning committees and boards.
2. When hired, professional staff should receive a formal orientation to the institution, the department or equivalent, and the institution's governance structure; they should also be advised of their rights under any collective bargaining agreement. If there is a collective bargaining contract, professional staff should be advised fully of their contractual rights and responsibilities.
3. Professional staff should have suitable working conditions and access to support services necessary to fulfill their responsibilities. Professional staff should have adequate supplies, access to campus facilities, including the library, and other campus privileges.
4. Professional staff should have a flexible schedule that provides the opportunity for committee work at the departmental or equivalent level. Time away from the job should be allowed for committee work during normal work hours. In cases where additional time is needed beyond the defined work week, compensatory time should apply.
5. Professional staff should have the right to help set the academic calendar for the institution.

Summary of Standards of Good Practice *(continued)*

ENSURING STANDARDS FOR UNION REPRESENTATION

1. In consideration of their representation in the bargaining unit, local unions representing professional staff should designate positions for them on their board of officers (or in elected leadership) so that professional staff issues are included in the local union's decision-making process.
2. The local union representing professional staff should provide an orientation handbook of rules, processes and advice for new union members. An orientation handbook should outline their rights, responsibilities and opportunities within the union.
3. For internal local union governance, professional staff should be guaranteed due process on all formal arbitrations and grievances. Professional staff should have an arbitrator-with knowledge of professional staff issues-to hear complaints over classification upgrades, discipline or other unfair practices.
4. All local unions with professional staff members should actively encourage participation in union affairs, and follow a policy of one person-one vote.
5. Local, state and national unions should provide all their members-both professional staff and classroom faculty-information on the role professional staff play at higher education institutions.
6. Professional staff should expect that their union, at the local, state and national level, will push for full implementation of the standards of good practices outlined in this report at its campuses and institutions.

Introduction

Who Are Professional Staff?

Almost everyone can conjure up a mental image of a college professor. A professor develops the curriculum for the classes he or she teaches. A professor teaches in the classroom and advises students outside the classroom about their academic work. A professor studies the latest disciplinary literature, attends professional conferences and conducts original research.

This, however, is only part of the staffing picture in the modern college or university. In addition to instructional staff, colleges rely on large numbers of personnel called classified or support staff serving in a wide variety of secretarial, clerical and technical support roles.

Another category of academic employee is professional staff (used in this publication), which also may be referred to as a variety of other names, such as academic professionals. Professional staff serve in capacities that link academic and administrative services for students. This fast-growing group is the focus of these standards.

It is impossible to define neatly the responsibilities of professional staff because they undertake an incredibly diverse set of tasks and their jobs are classified differently from one college to the next. For example, college librarians are categorized as faculty in some institutions and as professional staff in others. Here is just a sample of the roles filled by professional staff today:

- Student advisors who provide academic and career guidance and ensure that the needs of students of multiple ethnic and cultural backgrounds, ages and experiences are met;

- Administrative staff who handle joint planning and coordination of services. For example, internships, community programs and open-access facilities require professional support and coordination;
- Information technologists who support teaching, learning and research. Today's students, when they come to college, want learning opportunities outside as well as inside the classroom. The increased reliance on technology-including online learning and virtual communication-has greatly expanded the need for information service and support technicians;
- Laboratory managers and teaching assistants in science labs;
- Registrars;
- Instructional program directors;
- Medical personnel;
- Computer programmers and engineers;
- Admissions personnel;
- Financial aid counselors; and
- Development/public relations specialists.

How large is the cohort of professional staff?

In compiling national data, the U.S. Department of Education asks each institution of higher education to designate the number of workers it refers to as "noninstructional" staff. In 2003 the department reported that, out of 3 million higher education employees, almost 1.7 million were

Table 1. Professional staff at degree-granting institutions: Fall 1995-Fall 2003

	Fall 1995	Fall 1999	Fall 2003	Percent Change from Fall 1995 to Fall 2003
Total	415,892	451,076	541,472	30.2 %
Full-time	347,946	373,902	461,510	32.6 %
Part-time	67,946	77,174	79,962	17.7 %

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Fall Staff Survey, various years.

This group now represents almost 20 percent of the total higher education workforce.

noninstructional staff. These employees now outnumber all instructional staff by more than 250,000 and are increasing at a faster rate.

The government breaks down this category of "noninstructional" employees into the following subcategories: (1) executive/administrative/managerial, (2) technical and paraprofessional, (3) clerical and secretarial, (4) skilled crafts, (5) service/maintenance, and (6) other professional. Although, again, the actual breakdown of staff responsibilities will vary from institution to institution, it is this "other professionals" group that most professional staff fall into. This group now represents almost 20 percent of the total higher education workforce. Between 1995 and 2003, the Department of Education reports that the number of full-time professional staff in higher education grew by nearly 33 percent.

What explains the growth of professional staff?

A number of factors account for the growth of professional staff. One is the growing size and diversity of the student body. Today more than 15 million students attend more than 4,000 colleges and universities. Enrollment in higher education has grown by 12 percent since 1995 and 30 percent since 1985. With larger numbers of nontraditional students, including adult, low-income and minority students, the composite of those who want to attend college is diversifying, and the demand for services is increasing.

Today's students rely on immediate specialized care and learning opportunities outside as well as inside the classroom. Professional staff members are trained to understand student needs and provide the necessary services. For example, students' increased use of technology and need for open-access facilities, internships and community programs have led to new demands for well-trained professionals.

For better or for worse, many colleges have become multifaceted organizations encompassing job training, entertainment, food services, sports, housing, healthcare, and private research and development. The classroom mission of the institution is just one aspect of the total higher education experience. Professional staff are a key means of ensuring students are well-served.

Also contributing to the rise in professional staff numbers are the accountability and reporting requirements imposed by state and federal funding agencies. In addition, the share of state appropriations going to public higher education institutions has decreased. Paradoxically, the last 20 years have witnessed both dramatic growth in higher education and increasing fiscal austerity. Many indicators suggest that public funding will continue to be an unreliable source of support in the future.

The decline in public support has led colleges and universities to adopt a more corporate managerial model, which undermines collegiality and faculty governance, jeopardizing the mission of higher education. The managerial approach often has been to cut back on vital services and to move the staffing structure away from secure, well-paid tenured faculty jobs. To replace the teaching responsibilities of the tenured full-time faculty, college administrators increasingly rely on poorly paid and less autonomous part-time/adjunct faculty and other contingent faculty positions. Management also has turned to professional staff to take on out-of-classroom responsibilities formerly belonging to tenured full-time faculty, such as advising students.

Professional staff members often are in a better position than faculty to offer the array of specialized services today's students need. At the same time, professional staff are likely to be less autonomous and more subject to management control than the tenured faculty. Despite the importance of the functions they perform, and despite the level of skill required to perform those functions, professional staff generally are not compensated as well or treated with the same institutional respect as top administrators and teaching faculty. For these reasons, the American Federation of Teachers believes there is an urgent need to develop and enforce responsible standards of good practice in the employment of professional staff.

AFT, Professional Staff and Standards of Good Practice

The roles filled by professional staff are not ancillary to the learning process—they are the lifeblood of the institution, ensuring that interconnected services reach students in a form they can use. In order to do their best work, professional staff need clear expectations, job security, opportunities for professional development, avenues for advancement, appropriate compensation, manageable workload, and guaranteed participation in college decision-making. Unfortunately, campuses often lack these supports.

Colleges and universities should share decision-making authority more broadly with professional staff, as they do with faculty under the structure of shared governance. The AFT believes procedures should be established to ensure that professional staff members participate in all decisions about administrative services as well as in the shared governance process. Professional staff have perspectives on students' needs that should be considered when developing academic programs and standards.

The AFT is the largest union of college faculty and professional staff in the country. Among its 1.3 million members, the AFT represents 150,000 faculty and professional staff at colleges and universities. The union is active in organizing professional staff, and AFT Higher Education affiliates have some of the longest-standing and most sophisticated collective bargaining contracts for professional staff in the country.

This document sets forth standards of good practice for the employment of professional staff. It is one in a series of good practice publications released by the AFT. Other publications in this series include standards for part-time/adjunct faculty, graduate employees and full-time nontenure-track faculty. All are available on the AFT Web site, www.aft.org.

These guidelines were developed in consultation with an advisory committee of top professional staff leaders. They are intended to serve as a blueprint for the appropriate treatment of professional staff based on the principle that recognition and equity must be coupled with job security and professional treatment. This publication follows an earlier brochure, "Professionally Speaking," which highlighted

the issues faced by professional staff and their contributions to higher education.

The Standards of Good Practice for the employment of professional staff are divided into two sections:

1. Standards for Employment: Achieving Recognition and Job Security
 - Procedures and Requirements
 - Compensation
 - Professional Respect and Support; and
2. Standards for Union Representation: Ensuring Full Rights for Professional Staff within their Unions.

We hope this publication will enlighten public officials, college trustees and college administrators about the important benefits of strengthening professional staff's position on campus. We also hope professional staff members and their unions can use these standards in their discussions with faculty and management.

Professional staff have perspectives on students' needs that should be considered when developing academic programs and standards.

SECTION ONE

Standards for Employment: Achieving Recognition and Job Security

Procedures and Requirements

- 1. Professional staff should be guaranteed a voice in decision-making through a strong, open and cooperative partnership with university administration.** Cooperation between professional staff and their managers is critical to maintain an effective institutional workforce. Employee knowledge and experience must be considered at the beginning of any decision-making process. To the greatest extent possible, both parties should come to the table as equals. This gives employees—who know their jobs best—more control over their own work. Involving professional staff in workplace decision-making results in a stronger institution. While professional staff at some institutions do sit on committees or serve as advisors, this is rare. Truly shared power in decision-making is essential for staff input to be utilized effectively.
- 2. Professional staff hiring-based on procedures mutually agreed upon by administration and professional staff representatives should include an in-person interview and an open hiring process.** All too often, professional staff are hired sporadically and without transparency. Professional staff should know minimum standards for a position, including its education and experience requirements. The interview process should be conducted at the departmental or equivalent level, with participation of professional staff on search committees, and recommendations made to the college or university for final decision. A credible and organized interview and hiring process provides an essential foundation for open communication and professional recognition.
- 3. At the point of hiring, professional staff should be given a current and accurate position description that has been reviewed and approved by both the college and its professional staff.** Position descriptions should be developed by the individual departments, including the professional staff serving in those departments, in consultation with the human resource or personnel department on campus. They should be up-to-date with defined expectations, workload requirements, time allotment rules, and skill requirements. Having a current and accurate job description provides a baseline for evaluating job performance and commitment. Key elements in the description should include title, summary of job, examples of work, priority and schedule of duties, and education and experience requirements.
- 4. A clear performance evaluation system should be established based on current and accurate job descriptions.** Professional staff should be made aware of expectations for the successful performance of their duties. Evaluation should include discussions of working conditions, professional development, promotion opportunities and other key elements of the position.
- 5. After completing a probationary period, professional staff are entitled to job security.** Together, the administration and professional staff should designate a probationary period for new employees. After an employee completes the probationary period, an assessment committee should review his or her performance and make recommendations. The employee should be issued a

multi-year contract or given time for remediation. Contract renewal should be guaranteed unless the administration has raised serious concerns about performance or cites fiscal problems. Fiscal constraints must be demonstrated and not manipulated by managers to remove experienced staff for the sake of cutting costs.

Students deserve to have a stable workforce to handle their concerns. Tenure is the most appropriate and effective process for achieving this form of job security. At a minimum, professional staff should have a comparable tenure-style due process system with long-term contracts, adequate notice of non-renewal, seniority ranking, and the freedom to challenge management without sanctions.

- 6. Professional staff should have a clearly defined work schedule-based on procedures mutually agreed upon by administration and professional staff representatives-with options for comp time or flex time.** Professional staff face expanding job descriptions and growing workloads. To control the level of work and reward additional work with additional compensation, professional staff and their managers need first to clearly define a normal and livable work week. Once defined, a system should be set up to handle necessary compensation and concessions to those encountering "on-call" requirements, night work and other overtime hours. Failure to replace staff must not be used to increase workload and

should be discussed with professional staff.

- 7. If professional staff members' job responsibilities change substantially, they should be able to apply for a position reclassification review.** Professional staff members should be able to identify to their direct supervisor the specific duties they believe justify reclassification to a different title. Factors warranting a job reclassification may include the addition of new programs or expansion of existing programs; the realignment of organizational structures; the introduction of new, more complex technologies; or added educational or experience requirements.
- 8. An appeals process should be openly available to professional staff to handle any disputes, ranging from promotions to denial of reappointment.** A clearly defined and fair appeals process should be set up to handle any employment disputes and guarantee due process. Professional staff deserve to know that they will be treated with respect and that their concerns will be addressed in a timely and professional manner.

A major concern for professional staff is the possibility of changes in working conditions without due cause. Too often, professional staff are subjected to increases or adjustments in their duties or workloads, creating instability. Having a clear appeals procedure with due process is necessary to handle the situation immediately in a professional manner.

Compensation

- 1. Professional staff should have a fair and equitable salary classification structure for each job title based on procedures mutually agreed upon by administration and professional staff representatives.** One of the biggest challenges for any institution is the sheer diversity of jobs held by professional staff. To recognize their many different duties and levels of responsibility, an institution should clearly define its classification and salary system for the variety of job titles. The salary structure should be based on years of

experience and include provisions such as negotiated minimum salaries, advancement steps and salary ranks. To assure professional recognition and treatment, institutions should guarantee compensation based on evaluation of the position's requirements.

- 2. Professional staff should receive paid sick leave, paid holidays and breaks, health and pension benefits, and any other benefits necessary, comparable to those of faculty.** Professional staff serving in part-time positions should receive sick leave, holiday pay,

and health and pension benefits. Part-time or contingent status must not be manipulated to reduce costs. For all staff, these benefits should be paid year-round.

- 3. Funds should be designated for professional development and training.** Professional staff members face an ever-changing environment with increasing technological and professional demands. To respond to this effectively, institutions should designate adequate funds specifically for the professional development of these workers. Professional staff should also have access to tuition waivers, travel allowances, and financial support for conferences and other relevant programs. Actively encouraging professional staff to enhance their skills clearly benefits not only those workers, but the institutions and students as well.
- 4. Professional staff should have the option of sabbaticals or education leaves, as determined by a sabbaticals committee.** Additional leave time for educational purposes helps professional staff members expand their horizons, refresh their skills and bring a renewed perspective to the students they serve. Professional staff members who are excused from their regular duties to attend work-related training should not be required

to make up the time missed. Sabbatical committees that review requests for leave must include professional staff selected by peers.

- 5. Professional staff should be considered for promotions or salary increases based on professional development, supplemental education and years of experience.** Criteria for promotions should focus on, but not be limited to, professional development, years of service to the college or department, and quality of work. Professional staff members should receive support and compensation for educating themselves and making a long-term commitment to the institution. A clear procedure should exist for applying for promotions.
- 6. Notice of vacancies and the process for filling vacancies must be public and transparent.** A system should be in place for notice of all promotion opportunities. Professional staff should receive a timely and complete response from supervisors following any request for a promotion. Colleges and universities should follow previously defined procedures for determining whether professional staff members meet the criteria for promotions. Professional staff must know that they will be rewarded for their hard work, additional education, and overall commitment to their institution and its students.

Professional Respect and Support

- 1. Professional staff must have representation with full voting privileges on academic and institutional governing boards.** One of the toughest challenges for professional staff is finding their voices on college and university campuses. Considering the multiple roles professional staff fill and their unique perspectives on students' needs, slots should be reserved for them on governing and planning committees and boards. As academic employees, professional staff should have a role in the governance of their institutions.
- 2. When hired, professional staff should receive a formal orientation to the institution, the department or equivalent, and the institution's governance structure; they**

should also be advised of their rights under any collective bargaining agreement.

Professional staff should get adequate information about the institution and department (or equivalent). A formal orientation familiarizes new employees with their workplace and shows them how they fit in to the bigger picture. If there is a collective bargaining contract, professional staff should be advised fully of their contractual rights and responsibilities.

- 3. Professional staff should have suitable working conditions and access to support services necessary to fulfill their responsibilities.** Professional staff should not have to make extraordinary efforts to do their jobs.

Professional staff should have adequate supplies, access to campus facilities, including the library, and other campus privileges.

4. **Professional staff should have a flexible schedule that provides the opportunity for committee work at the departmental or equivalent level.** Time away from the job should be allowed for committee work during normal work hours. In cases where additional time is needed beyond the defined work week, compensatory time should apply.

5. **Professional staff should have the right to help set the academic calendar for the institution.** Having separate duties from instructional staff, professional staff often work hours when classes are not in session. They can provide valuable information on institutional life that may not be available to instructional staff or administration. Their input on the academic calendar is critical to the overall performance and functioning of the university.

SECTION TWO

Standards for Union Representation: Ensuring Full Rights for Professional Staff within their Unions

To put these standards into practice, it is best to have a legally enforceable collectively bargained contract and a strong national union. Sometimes the union for professional staff will represent only those staff members; more often, they will join college faculty in a larger union. In cases where professional staff members are one of many constituencies in the union, the union must ensure that professional staff interests are defended as vigorously as those of any other component of the union. All union members must be informed and empowered.

Professional staff are vital members of the American Federation of Teachers, and we are deeply committed to their needs for recognition, communication and security. Unions at the local, state and national levels must value the role this rapidly growing group plays in higher education.

1. **In consideration of their representation in the bargaining unit, local unions representing professional staff should designate positions for them on their board of officers (or in elected leadership) so that professional staff issues are included in the local union's**

decision-making process. Having designated representatives for professional staff ensures they have a voice in union governance.

2. **The local union representing professional staff should provide an orientation handbook of rules, processes and advice for new union members.** Communication is essential to support and involve professional staff members. An orientation handbook should outline their rights, responsibilities and opportunities within the union.
3. **For internal local union governance, professional staff should be guaranteed due process on all formal arbitrations and grievances.** Professional staff should have an arbitrator-with knowledge of professional staff issues-to hear complaints over classification upgrades, discipline or other unfair practices.
4. **All local unions with professional staff members should actively encourage participation in union affairs, and follow a policy of one person-one vote.** One person-one vote is part of the AFT Constitution. Professional staff, often silenced at work, should always be treated with respect and know that their voic-

es will be heard equally on all union matters.

5. **Local, state and national unions should provide all their members-both professional staff and classroom faculty-information on the role professional staff play at higher education institutions.** To fight collectively for the rights and working conditions of professional staff, the entire union must understand and respect the commitment, performance and perspectives of these professionals.
6. **Professional staff should expect that their union, at the local, state and national level, will push for full implementation of the standards of good practices outlined in this report at its campuses and institutions.**

Where professional staff and other academic employees are in the same union on campus, professional staff members have a right to expect that their fellow members, including

classroom faculty, will advocate for the implementation of these best practices. It is important for all union members to reinforce the concept of solidarity and understand that contractual rights are only as good as the union is strong. We are a single union of professionals, and we must promote, protect and fight for the rights of all.

When professional staff members are not in the same union as other academic employees, regular communication should be established between the two groups. Also, professional staff locals across institutions should provide information and support to one another.

In short, the union should be a place where all elements of the workforce can come together as equals, where the hierarchies of the academy are undone.

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For more information about the American Federation of Teachers' work on professional staff issues, visit the AFT Higher Education Web site at www.aft.org/higher_ed.





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