



OP 70.07: RESEARCH SCIENTISTS

PURPOSE

A comprehensive university requires a cadre of personnel who are able to devote full time to research. The purpose of this document is to establish a consistent set of titles for such positions pertaining to research scientist activities and to establish promotion criteria and approval process as it relates to HRM 60.323 for the positions. Existing procedures are to be used for establishing positions, advertising vacancies, and filling positions.

POLICY

All regulations of Mississippi State University concerning employment and promotion must adhere to the By-Laws and Policies of the Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning (1970, with subsequent amendments). Every person employed by the University is expected to meet high standards of professional integrity, collegiality and objectivity, and to further the goals of his/her unit(s) and the University. In addition, a person of research scientist rank must have a minimum of a Ph.D. degree with a range of scientific research experience and professional accomplishments; a strong commitment to higher education, and in particular to the mission of Mississippi State University; and a willingness to assume the responsibilities and obligations appropriate to a professional university employee.

Position Titles

Four levels of appointment are to be used for professional Scientist positions:

1. Research Scientist I
2. Research Scientist II
3. Research Scientist III
4. Senior Research Scientist

Rankings and qualifications within levels are on a case-by-case basis with factors that include work experience, the publication record, past research funding, professional honors and awards, decisive discoveries and management experience.

General Criteria for Appointment to Research Scientist Positions

Criteria for appointment/hiring, promotion and retention of Research Scientists outlined in this policy are the same regardless of fund source.

Rank	Education	Experience
Research Scientist I	Ph.D.	Generally within three years after receiving their Ph.D. and with limited scientific research experience
Research Scientist II	Ph.D.	Three to seven years of relevant experience beyond the Ph.D. level and with very significant professional accomplishments
Research Scientist III	Ph.D.	More than seven years of relevant experience beyond the Ph.D. and with extremely significant professional accomplishments
Senior Research Scientist	Ph.D.	Individuals well beyond the Ph.D. that have demonstrated outstanding sustained, and extraordinary professional accomplishments as well as professional leadership

Suggested Performance Standards of Professional Activities

In every case, the performance of research scientist personnel will be judged by all parties involved in promotion decisions on the basis of written policy statements or criteria (i.e., specific requirements) developed by the specific units with which the individual is associated. All criteria should be based on the application of the highest professional standards associated with the university work. Some suggested items to consider in establishing evaluative criteria at the unit level follow:

Annual Evaluation and Review of Research Scientists

Supervisors of Research Scientists are required to annually evaluate employee performance. Annual performance evaluations should provide Research Scientists with insight regarding progress towards promotion. On an annual basis, each department head or appropriate officer and each of his/her employees in research scientist positions will agree in writing to the employee's objectives, responsibilities, and expectations. This written agreement must be consistent with the promotion criteria for research scientist positions of the department, specific unit and the University. This agreement will be reviewed by the next appropriate administrator, and a copy placed in the employee's promotion file. If the department head and employee cannot reach an agreement, the matter will be referred to the next appropriate administrator.

An annual performance review, based on the predetermined agreement, will be conducted by the department head or appropriate officer and each research employee in his/her department before the budget is made for the next year or when specified by the central administration of the University, whichever occurs first. A copy of this review, signed by both parties, will be reviewed by the next appropriate administrator and placed in the employee's promotion file. The employee may attach a dissenting statement to all copies of this review.

A permanent, confidential file for each research scientist employee is to be maintained by the department head or appropriate officer. No record in the file is to be added, changed, or withdrawn without the knowledge of both parties. The responsible administrative officer will make all pertinent information available to the appropriate individuals when the employee is a

candidate for promotion, or when the information is needed in an appeals or grievance case.

Guidelines for Promotion of Research Scientists

It is desirable for the University's Research Scientists to advance professionally. The purpose of these guidelines is to describe promotion criteria for each of the Research Scientist levels to qualify for advancement to the next level. Performance is defined and evaluated in an individual's annual evaluation as outlined in University Operating Policies and Procedures 13.24: <http://www.policies.msstate.edu/>.

The promotion of Research Scientists will be initiated by a letter from the supervisor with supporting documentation as appropriate. The letter of application must be approved by signature through the employee's supervisor, Department Head, Dean/Director, and the Vice President for Research and Economic Development or Vice President for Agriculture, Forestry and Veterinary Medicine or both when there is a joint appointment.

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Denial of the promotion application must be documented with rationale for said denial in a letter to the employee. The employee would then have the right to appeal the denial to the next higher administrator outside the department level by specifically addressing the items listed in the denial letter.

Performance Standards for Promotion of Research Scientists

The University recognizes achievement of Research Scientists by advancement. Promotion is never granted routinely for simple satisfactory accomplishment. Rank also reflects comparable stature with others in similar disciplines in other university settings. Promotion is based on performance and demonstrated competence and not solely on length of service, but a reasonable time must elapse for the individual to demonstrate competence and have it confirmed through periodic evaluation. Professional achievement elsewhere will be considered for promotion.

Evaluation criteria within the Office of Research and Economic Development (ORED) and Division of Agriculture, Forestry, and Veterinary Medicine (DAFVM) are listed in Table 1. Criteria are based upon levels of independence/leadership, creative contribution/scientific endeavor, and professional development/activities.

Table 1. Evaluation criteria for promotion of Research Scientists within ORED and DAFVM

	Research Scientist Promotion Level		
	I to II	II to III	III to Senior
Minimum Years of Employment at Previous Level	2 years	2 years	2 years
Minimum Educational Requirement	Ph.D.	Ph.D.	Ph.D.
Performance*	Excellence in 1 area with satisfactory in at least 1 additional area	Excellence in 2 areas	Excellence in two areas with satisfactory in at least 2 additional areas
Annual Evaluation**	Average overall rating of 3.0 or higher on each of the last three annual evaluations	Average overall rating of 3.0 or higher on each of the last three annual evaluations	Average overall rating of 3.0 or higher on each of the last three annual evaluations

* Performance for ORED Research Scientists is defined as Scholarly Activities, Oral Presentations, Impact and Outcome Measures and Grants, Contracts and Resources related to Program Mission. [Division of Research - Application for Promotion, Research Engineers and Research Associates](#) and for DAFVM Research Scientists in the [DAFVM Application for Promotion](#)

** Documented in the ORED Annual Evaluation Form [Division of Research - Research Engineers, Research Associates, and Post-Doctoral Fellow Evaluation Forms](#) and the [DAFVM Annual Evaluation Form](#)

Supervisors of Research Scientists are responsible for providing a working environment that allows the employee to function as a professional member of the University and achieve orderly growth in professional stature and rank. Specific responsibilities of supervisors include:

1. Conduct an annual performance appraisal based on job-related criteria and submit on the appropriate form www.hrm.msstate.edu/
2. Submit a “Progress Toward Promotion” form, in addition to the “Annual Performance Appraisal” form www.hrm.msstate.edu/
3. Assist Scientists in collecting and preparing documents for “Applications for Promotion”.
4. Provide opportunities for professional development and achievement.
5. Acknowledge the intellectual contributions of Scientists by including them as coauthors of research publications, when appropriate.

6. Supervisors should involve Scientists in the writing and administration of grants consistent with source of funds and time and effort reporting.
7. Incorporate potential salary adjustments in development of extramural budgets, since Research Scientists are often extramurally funded.

Compensation for Educational Achievement or Promotion

The University grants an increase in annual salary, subject to the availability of funds, to employees who become certified by a recognized and accredited certification program, or who earn an associate's, bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree. This certification or degree must be in an academic discipline that is relevant and related to the employee's current position and should enhance the employee's ability to perform the duties of that position. If the completion of certification or degree is a condition of employment, employees are ineligible for additional compensation. Please see: www.hrm.msstate.edu/compensation/policies/educ/.

Recommended promotion compensation increments are:

Research Scientist I to II = \$4,000
Research Scientist II to III = \$4,500
Research Scientist III to Senior = \$5,000

Schedule for Promotion Decisions

Departmental recommendations may be submitted to the appropriate dean, director and then to the appropriate vice presidents(s) any time of the year. The Vice President(s) will evaluate the recommendations of the dean/director based on applicant satisfying the criteria, as set forth.

A letter requesting an appropriate salary increase must accompany the promotion packet. Letters should include the current salary and proposed post promotion salary. Signature approval for salary increases should follow guidelines in HRM's Staff Compensation Program (HRM 60.323).

REVIEW

This policy and procedure will be reviewed every four years or as needed by the Vice President for Research and Economic Development and the Vice President for the Division of Agriculture, Forestry, and Veterinary Medicine or when revisions are made to HRM 60.323 with recommendations for revisions presented to the President. Input may be provided to the Vice Presidents by Human Resources Management.

REVIEWED BY:

/s/ Julie Jordan
Vice President for Research and Economic Development

5/5/2023
Date

/s/ Keith Coble
Vice President for Agriculture, Forestry, and Veterinary Medicine

5/5/2023
Date

/s/ Tracey N. Baham
Associate Vice President, Institutional Strategy & Effectiveness

5/8/2023
Date

/s/ Joan Lucas
General Counsel

5/11/2023
Date

APPROVED:

/s/ Mark E. Keenum
President

7/24/2023
Date