

University Policy 311: Setting Expectations and Managing Performance

Category: Human Resources

Sub Category: General

Covered Individuals: Benefit-Eligible Staff

Responsible Executive: Vice President for Finance and Administrative Services

Policy Custodian: Office of Human Resources, Associate Vice President of Human Resources

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311.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This policy guides supervisors in managing employee job performance through setting clear expectations, providing performance improvement measures, and applying disciplinary actions when needed. Employees and supervisors should work collaboratively to identify where and why work performance and/or behavior is not meeting expectations, and implement viable solutions.

311.2 POLICY

Utah State University (USU) values a respectful, safe, and productive work environment. All employees are expected to meet performance expectations, including conducting themselves with professionalism in accordance with USU [Policy 321: Respectful Workplace](#).

Unacceptable work performance—whether due to inability or unwillingness to perform up to standards that are measurable, observable, objective, and specific—should be addressed through progressive performance management.

2.1 Setting Expectations and Identifying Performance Issues

Supervisors should establish clear expectations for acceptable work performance via a clear job description, supervisory guidance, coaching, training, policy, rules, and regulations using tools and methods to measure results to create a work environment which allows employees to perform their best. Employees should seek clarification from their supervisor when they feel expectations are not clear.

Generally, when a performance issue is first identified, it should be handled informally between the employee and their supervisor through feedback, coaching, and/or additional training.

Examples of unacceptable work performance include but are not limited to:

- Non-compliance with supervisory direction, coaching, training, policy, rules, and regulations;
- Behavior not in accordance with USU [Policy 321: Respectful Workplace](#);
- Tardiness or non-compliance with designated work schedule; and
- Absenteeism.

2.2 Addressing Unacceptable Work Performance

If a performance issue cannot be addressed or corrected through informal methods, the next step may be

disciplinary action. Supervisors are encouraged to consult with the Office of Human Resources in cases where it is unclear which method of correction to use when managing an employee performance issue.

2.2.1 Performance Improvement Measures

When informal efforts do not correct unacceptable work performance, documented performance improvement measures should be used, including a Letter of Expectations (LOE) or a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP). Supervisors should maintain documentation of all performance improvement measures, both formal and informal.

2.2.2 Letter of Expectations

The Letter of Expectations (LOE) is a tool to help supervisors clarify expectations in writing for acceptable work performance. This letter should be used in conjunction with a one-on-one meeting to provide guidance, direction, and clear expectations regarding performance in the workplace. The LOE is not considered a formal step in the disciplinary process.

2.2.3 Performance Improvement Plan

A Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) identifies unacceptable work performance and reasons for the performance gap, creates a plan of action with employee input, and provides the opportunity for employees to succeed in their role with USU. A PIP includes a specific completion timeline with each party's responsibilities within the given timeline. Both the employee and the supervisor should sign the PIP. If the employee declines to sign, it should be noted on the PIP. A PIP may be used in conjunction with a written warning when appropriate. A PIP is not considered a formal step in the disciplinary process.

2.3 Disciplinary Action

Disciplinary action is a formal process used to correct unacceptable work performance, misconduct, or failure to comply with departmental or university policy. Disciplinary action is typically imposed on a progressive basis moving from verbal to written to a final action, including termination. Progressive steps (see 2.3.1) may be skipped or repeated depending on the frequency, severity, or nature of the unacceptable work performance.

In circumstances of serious misconduct, suspension without pay or immediate termination without notice may be appropriate.

Supervisors must review formal disciplinary actions with the Office of Human Resources before taking any action.

2.3.1 Progressive Steps

(a) Verbal Warning

Initial disciplinary action should be in the form of verbal, face-to-face discussion with subsequent documentation. This meeting should be held in private, with an opportunity for problem solving, resulting in clear problem identification, correction strategies, and employee commitment to improve. This meeting should be documented with the employee's signature and date. If the employee declines to sign, it should be noted. The document should inform the employee (1) this is the first step of disciplinary action, and (2) of the consequences if performance does not improve. The employee has the right to respond verbally and/or attach written comments to the verbal warning documentation. Verbal warnings do not need to be submitted to the Office of Human Resources or placed in the employee's personnel file.

(b) Written Warning

The purpose of a written warning is to further address failure to meet expectations. The written warning should be a formal letter presented in a private face-to-face meeting. This private meeting should provide an opportunity for problem solving resulting in clear problem identification, correction strategies, and

employee commitment to improve. This meeting should be documented with the employee's signature and the date. If the employee declines to sign, it should be noted. The document should inform the employee (1) this is a disciplinary action, and (2) of consequences if performance does not improve. The employee has the right to respond verbally and/or attach written comments to the written warning. The employee will receive a copy of the written warning letter and a copy must be sent to the department head/director and the Office of Human Resources to be filed in the employee's personnel file.

(c) Termination

Termination is a decision made between the supervisor, the department head/director, and the Office of Human Resources. Termination may be considered when:

- The employee has failed to meet the performance expectations after being given an opportunity to improve.
- The employee has shown evidence of their inability or unwillingness to improve their performance.
- The employee's inappropriate behavior has remained the same or worsened.
- The particular circumstance or serious misconduct warrants immediate termination.

(See USU [Policy 399: Termination of Exempt and Non-Exempt Staff](#).)

Once a decision to terminate has been made, the department head/director works with the Office of Human Resources to create a letter of termination to be delivered to the employee, in person, whenever possible. A copy will be placed in the employee's personnel file in accordance with USU [Policy 399: Termination of Exempt and Non-Exempt Staff](#). If the employee is not available, the notice of termination will be sent by certified mail to the employee's last known address or be delivered verbally via phone. If notices or letters are mailed, they are deemed effective for all purposes once deposited at the US Post Office or a designated delivery service equivalent to the United States registered or certified mail.

2.4 Resignation in Lieu of Disciplinary Action or Termination

An employee may resign, foregoing any rights to file a grievance, rather than face corrective action or disciplinary action (see USU [Policy 325: Staff Employee Grievance](#)). Employees cannot be compelled to resign; resignation must be voluntary, made in writing, and cannot be rescinded without mutual agreement by both the employee and the university.

2.5 Introductory Period of Employment

As noted in USU [Policy 395: Introductory Period of Employment](#), new benefit-eligible staff members are to complete an introductory period. During their introductory period of employment, employees may be terminated without notice or prior warnings.

2.6 Paid Administrative Leave

In some cases, allegations of misconduct may lead to an investigation. During this process, it may be necessary and appropriate to place the employee on paid administrative leave pending completion of the investigation. Administrative leave is not a sanction for any alleged behavior(s) that have been reported. During paid administrative leave, the employee's pay and benefits are not affected. Administrative leave is used as an interim measure to protect the integrity of the investigation and avoid any claim that an employee may have adversely influenced the investigation in any way. Administrative leave also protects the employee from additional allegations or accusations of retaliation when the investigation is completed.

2.7 Employee Response to Disciplinary Action

If an employee questions actions, or if they feel the actions are unwarranted or unjust, the following options are available to the employee:

- (1) Attach written comments to any performance documentation within 30 calendar days of receiving;

- (2) Consult with the Office of Human Resources; or
- (3) Initiate a formal grievance under USU [Policy 325: Staff Employee Grievance](#), where appropriate.

311.3 RESPONSIBILITIES

3.1 Department Heads and Supervisors

Department heads and supervisors are responsible for setting clear, consistent, and fair performance and conduct standards in accordance with this policy. They work collaboratively with their employees to help them perform to the best of their ability and to hold employees accountable when standards are not met to include taking appropriate corrective and/or disciplinary action.

Department heads and supervisors must consult with the Office of Human Resources prior to any formal disciplinary actions.

3.2 Office of Human Resources

The Office of Human Resources is responsible for providing guidance and direction to both the employees and the supervisors regarding the setting of expectations and managing employee performance.

3.3 Employees

Employees are responsible for working closely with supervisors to have expectations from supervisors and the university clarified, and work to address performance or conduct issues if or when they occur.

311.4 REFERENCES

- None

311.5 RELATED USU POLICIES

- USU [Policy 321: Respectful Workplace](#)
- USU [Policy 325: Staff Employee Grievance](#)
- USU [Policy 395: Introductory Period of Employment](#)
- USU [Policy 399: Termination of Exempt and Non-Exempt Staff](#)

311.6 DEFINITIONS

6.1 Disciplinary Action

Employment-related action undertaken to correct or modify unacceptable job performance or behavior to acceptable standards. Disciplinary actions include verbal warnings, written warnings, suspension without pay, and termination of employment.

Information below is not included as part of the contents of the official policy. It is provided only as a convenience for readers/users and may be changed at any time by persons authorized by the president.

RESOURCES

Procedures

- None

Guidance

- None

Related Forms and Tools

- None

Contacts

- None

POLICY HISTORY

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