

University of Montana Unit Standards Committee Annual Report

Academic Year 2023-2024

Submitted by: Donna McCrea, Chair

Date: April 29, 2024

Committee Members:

Jackson Bunch, Sociology (2026)

John Eglin, History (2026)

Ramona Grey, Political Science (2026)

Stephen Lodmell, Division of Biological Sciences (2026)

Donna McCrea, Mansfield Library (2025)

Yolanda Reimer, Computer Science (term starting January 2024) (2026)

Ona Renner-Fahey, World Languages and Culture (2025)

Jennifer Schoffer Closson, Speech, Language, Hearing and Occupational Sciences (2025)

Diana Six, Ecosystem and Conservation Sciences (term ending December 2023)

Purpose of the Unit Standards Committee

The Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) 10.100 states, “The University Standards Committee shall work with units to bring the Unit Standards into compliance [with the CBA] pursuant to Section 10.130 and following the guidelines in Section 10.120.”

Committee Review Process

The Unit Standards Committee (USC) Procedures indicate that standards approved by their units and dean should be received by the Provost’s Office for distribution to the USC on or before September 30. In practice the Provost’s Office receives standards throughout the academic year (generally in the Fall). The USC queues standards for review according to when they were received. The USC chair communicates review timeline expectations with the unit and the Provost’s Office.

All USC members review each set of standards. When the USC believes the submitted standards do not comply with the CBA they are sent by the USC chair back to the department chairperson. The USC provides comments, concerns and recommendations.

When a set of standards is approved by the USC, a Worksheet with the USC’s comments (if any) and formal documentation of approval is completed and submitted to the unit, Dean and Provost. The Unit Standards Signature Form is signed by the USC chair.

For the past several years the USC and Provost’s Office have used e-mail to communicate about the status of standards and Box to share files.

Standards Reviewed This Year

During the 2023-2024 academic year the USC reviewed new standards received from seven units: Anthropology, Biomedical and Pharmaceutical Sciences, Computer Science, Counseling, Music, Social Work, and World Languages and Culture. The Committee also reviewed revisions of five sets of standards originally submitted to the USC during the 2022-2023 Academic Year: Environmental Studies, Geosciences, Mathematics, Psychology, and Physical Therapy and Rehabilitation Science.

Of the new and revised standards reviewed, eight were approved by the USC on or before April 22, 2024. Per CBA 10.120: “Units may submit unit standards modified at the request of the Provost directly to the Provost’s office without need to have approval from the Unit Standards Committee.”

Mathematics submitted standards directly to the Provost without USC approval. The USC encouraged Social Work to submit their standards directly to the Provost due to the USC’s uncertainty around UFA and Provost interpretation of Policy 350 related to promotion to Full Professor for non-tenure track faculty.

USC Comments and Recommendations from the 2023-2024 Review Year

General comments

- The USC should have ten members. The USC was short members this year. This, of course, increases the workload for each committee member. Ideally the committee would always have at least nine members, three of whom have three or more years of experience on the committee and three with two or more years of experience. There is a learning curve to the committee’s work. Ideally the committee should always include at least one non-tenure track faculty member.
- The USC’s members are drawn from the Professional Schools (four), the Humanities (two), the Sciences (two), and the Social Sciences (two). If these designations are important, it would be helpful to have an easy-to-access list of which units fall into each of these categories for the purpose of recruitments and appointments.
- Most units whose standards were last revised prior to 2018 are needing for the first time to clearly articulate criteria for normal, above normal and outstanding to meet the expectations of CBA 10.120.3.c. Helping units address this expectation has resulted in what is likely a higher-than-usual number of units whose standards were not approved upon first review by the USC. Barring future substantive changes to the CBA, the revision and review process should get easier for units and the USC.
- The USC is a committee where important work is accomplished, and where every member of the committee contributes. It can also be a time-consuming committee. Meeting attendance is expected and work assignments between meetings is typical. That said, any faculty member interested in helping UM ensure a fair evaluation, tenure and promotion process should consider service on the USC.
- The USC received a number of notes of thanks from units this year, as well as comments that the USC’s review had strengthened and/or added clarity to their standards.

CBA-related comments submitted to the UFA and the Provost's Office for consideration when section 10.000 of the CBA is next opened.

These comments are included in this annual report in the interest of transparency.

- [Non-tenure Track Promotion to Full Without Scholarship](#): It is not clear in the language of Policy 350, appended to the CBA, whether or not non-tenure track faculty with no workload assignment in Scholarship and Creative Activity, and no activity in Scholarship and Creative Activity, can be promoted to Full Professor. Or at least the intent was not clear to the USC, because Policy 350 states that the qualifications for Professor must be consistent with the CBA and CBA 10.110.1.d includes the following: “[n]o faculty member may be promoted to full professor on the basis of teaching and service alone. Scholarship shall be demonstrated by scholarly publication, scholarship of teaching and learning, or appropriate public recognition for creative works.”
 - An MOU signed by the UFA president, the UM Provost, and an OCHE representative, effective April 4, 2024, was shared with Donna McCrea, Chair of the USC, on April 18, 2024. Email communication from both Allen Szalda-Petree, President of the UFA, and John DeBoer, UM Vice Provost for Academic Affairs, clarify that (per Szalda-Petree's email) the intent of Policy 350 and the MOU is to document that non-tenure track promotion is “‘based on assigned activity’. [Non-tenure track faculty] can be promoted based on teaching alone if that is their assigned activity.”
 - The USC recommends that, when revised, the CBA make clear that non-tenure track faculty can be promoted to Full Professor without activity in Scholarship if they do not have Scholarship in their assigned workload.
- [Student Observer on the FEC](#): CBA 10.240 states “One student observer with all rights, save voting, *shall be appointed* by the committee chairperson from among the majors and/or graduate students in the unit” (emphasis mine). Given that the FEC review is akin to a personnel review, concern has been expressed about the mandate for a student observer in the process. In fact, anecdotally some units have treated this as a may rather than a shall.
 - The USC recommends that the UFA and Provost consider whether a student observer should be mandatory or optional for the FEC. Or if the student observer should be completely removed from the FEC.
- [Student Evaluation Committees and Evidence](#): Per CBA 10.230, “The committee shall review course evaluations and may seek or receive relevant evidence from students who have taken courses from or have been advisees of the faculty member being evaluated.”
 - Just as there is potential for implicit and explicit bias in course evaluations, there is also an opportunity to deflate or inflate the evaluation of a faculty member through the collection of evidence. (Anecdotes indicate this is a real issue with real consequences for faculty.) Are there any guidelines for SECs that should be considered or added to this section to clarify what the CBA intent is for the seeking of ‘relevant evidence’?
- [Less-than-Normal Review](#): CBA 10.110.3.c states “Poor performance of assigned responsibilities within the scope of employment may constitute grounds for a less-than-normal evaluation. It is understood that the absence of performance in any one or two of the areas of teaching,

scholarship/creative activity, and public service does not justify a less-than-normal evaluation. Performance is to be evaluated consistent with workload assignment.”

- Must a tenure-track faculty have ‘less than normal’ performance in two of the three assigned areas of activity to be recommended for a less-than-normal increment, or can a tenure-track faculty member with unacceptable performance in only one of their three required areas of activity be recommended for less-than-normal?
 - Perhaps this section is trying to address the absence of performance for both tenure-track faculty and non-tenure track faculty (who may have activities in only one or two areas and not three). If that is the case, separate sentences may make the intent clearer.
- **Timeline for USC Evaluation of Standards:** Per CBA 10.120, “If the Unit Standards Committee does not approve any specific set of unit standards within forty (40) working days of submission by the unit, those standards shall be forwarded directly to the Provost for consideration.” In practice, the 40-day timeline is not feasible when multiple sets of standards are received on or near the same time. Forty working days is an unrealistically short turn-around time for the USC to conduct its review, even when it is fully populated.
 - The USC recommends that the Committee’s review period be extended to 90 days, and that the CBA include an option for the USC to request an extension of the review period from the unit and Provost’s Office. (The Provost’s Office may also wish to request extra time for its review.) [In practice this communication and extension of review time has been happening for years.]
 - **Outstanding Performance Award:** The OPA is currently lumped in with the Merit award in CBA 10.110.c.a.
 - The USC recommends that information about the OPA be in a separate subsection so that it can be clearly stated that non-tenure-track (ntt) ‘performance is to be evaluated consistent with workload assignment.’ Meaning that it should be clear that if a ntt faculty has workload assignment only in Teaching they do not need to demonstrate activities in Service or Scholarship to qualify for the OPA.
 - Can an ‘Above Normal’ recommendation in only one area qualify a non-tenure track faculty member with assignment in only one area (or two) for an OPA. Or must the ntt faculty be evaluated as ‘Outstanding’ in one area or “Above Normal’ in two, the same as a tenure-track faculty member?
 - **Faculty Signatures on Recommendations:** In CBA 10.250 (Chair review) it is clear that a faculty member’s signature on their review document (or marking an electronic check box in the online IPR submission portal) indicates only that the faculty member has read the recommendation, *not* that the faculty member agrees with or approves the recommendation as written. “Each recommendation shall be signed by the faculty member to attest that the faculty member has read it.” This same clarification is not provided in the sections for the Student Evaluation Committee recommendation and FEC recommendation. As the IPR submission and recommendation acknowledgement process has shifted to an online platform, the communication from entities managing the electronic submissions has not always been accurate. In some cases, the word ‘agree’ or ‘approve’ has been used.
 - The USC recommends that the CBA clearly state in each section (10.230 and 10.240) that a signature acknowledges that the faculty member has read the document.

- **Who Sees Previous Recommendations:** CBA 10.220 states: “Copies of the SEC, FEC, chair, dean and Provost’s recommendations from all evaluations during the performance period must be included in the Individual Performance Record (IPR) before transmittal to the dean.” In some units these recommendation documents are required to be a part of the IPR that goes to the FEC. In other units, this information is provided only to the Dean.
 - What is the intent of the process? Can each unit define this process for themselves? (If so, not providing access to the FEC to past IPRs would need to be enabled within the IPR electronic submission system.)

- **Role of the USC:** Is the USC an advisory body or an approval body? Can the Provost alone approve standards? There are areas in the CBA related to the role of the Unit Standards Committee that appear to contradict each other.
 - The USC recommends that currently conflicting language be revised to clarify the situation.
 - CBA 10.130 – units submit their standards for evaluation every 5 years and ‘The unit faculty, department chairperson, the Unit Standards Committee, the appropriate dean, and Provost must approve any proposed change.’
 - CBA 10.120.3.j – [standards must] “be approved by the Unit Standards Committee, the appropriate dean, and the Provost prior to application for evaluation purposes.”

Yet also in CBA 10.120, is this sentence: “Units may submit unit standards modified at the request of the Provost directly to the Provost’s office without need to have approval from the Unit Standards Committee. In this latter event, the Provost shall so inform the Unit Standards Committee and subsequently provide the Unit Standards Committee with the final disposition of the issue.”

- **Promotion to Assistant Professor:** CBA 10.110.1.a is ‘Promotion to Assistant Professor.’ However, it is the understanding of the USC that a faculty member may not be *promoted* to Assistant from an existing non-faculty or non-tenure track faculty position, but rather must be hired into (appointed to) Assistant.
 - Should this instead read ‘Appointment to Assistant Professor’? (But still Promotion to Associate and Full.)

- **Section 10.340:** There are several areas of CBA 10.000 which refer to section 10.340, even though there is no longer a section 10.340.