

STAFF Merit Guidelines

Fiscal Year 2027

PURPOSE

Merit adjustments, along with other initiatives such as training programs and educational benefits, support UTRGV's talent management strategy that seeks to retain the best, most productive and most highly motivated individuals.

TIMELINE

May 31, 2026	Annual staff evaluations due
October 5, 2026	Human Resources (HR) provides merit pool listings and templates to each division head or designee
October 9, 2026	Deadline to complete all required trainings, evaluations and reporting
October 19, 2026	Completed merit materials due to HR for review no later than this date (including division head review)
October 26, 2026	Merit materials returned to the division offices by HR
November 1, 2026	Effective date for merit
December 1, 2026	Merit pay increase included in paycheck

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA i ii iii iv v

Staff employees are eligible for merit if they:

- Have had uninterrupted employment at UTRGV since November 1, 2025.
- Are current on all compliance training and Conflict of Interest reporting required through UTRGV no later than October 9, 2026.
- Meet established Evaluation Criteria:
 - Classified Staff: Have a completed and current overall positive rating on their employee performance evaluation on file with the HR Office (evaluation rating of at least 3 out of 5), have not had a disciplinary action on file with HR since September 1, 2025, and performance is deemed as meritorious by their supervisor/department head.
 - A&P: Have a completed and current evaluation on file that meets or exceeds expectations, have not had disciplinary action on file with HR since September 1, 2025, and performance is deemed as meritorious by their supervisor/department head.
- **Employees in a staff title who received a salary adjustment due to a Hiring Action, Staff Equity Adjustment, JAR or JDQ effective March 1, 2026 and later, and where the adjustment exceeds 5% will not be eligible for merit consideration. These positions will not generate a merit pool contribution. In future merit cycles, a March 1 eligibility cutoff date will be applied for similar salary adjustments.**

Note: Eligibility for merit does not guarantee an award. Future merit award cycles will be contingent upon institutional approval and funding availability.

MERIT POOLS / METHODOLOGY

The Planning & Analysis and HR Offices will compute the merit pools for each division and department based on 1% of the July 1, 2026, salary for each budgeted, filled position subject to a minimum of \$600 and a maximum of \$3,000 per position.

Merit pool dollars will not be generated for vacancies and positions filled after July 1, 2026 or filled positions excluded as stated above.

MERIT DISTRIBUTION

For staff meeting the established eligibility criteria the increase should be a minimum of \$600 and a maximum of 2% or \$3,000, if 2% exceeds \$3,000. The divisions have discretion in establishing their award criteria and methodologies as long as those criteria do not conflict with the guidelines outlined in this document. The division heads will review and approve the criteria established at each department/unit to ensure a merit distribution that is fair, equitable and free of disparate impact. For example, all eligible employees in a division could be provided a base amount with an incremental amount above the base going to employees with exceptional performance. Across the board merit increases will not be approved. If a potential conflict arises, HR Compensation should be consulted to ensure a merit distribution that is fair, equitable and free of disparate impact.

Merit pool contributions for divisions will be finalized when merit spreads are distributed, no revisions due to transitioning employees will be made. Employees in transition due to recruitment activities with a salary adjustment exceeding 5% will not be eligible for merit consideration.

APPROVAL

Merit awards for staff employees should be recommended by each employee's department head and processed through the chain of command for consideration of approval by the respective divisional head.

ANNUAL PERFORMANCE EVALUATIONS REQUIRED^{vi}

Staff merit awards must be supported by an employee performance evaluation on file at the HR Office for each employee. Only staff meeting established performance evaluation criteria will be eligible for merit. Staff without a performance evaluation on file, as well as their supervisors, will not be eligible for merit unless sufficient documentation has been reviewed and approved by the VP for Human Resources. For information on the evaluation process, refer to the Handbook of Operating Procedures (HOP) ADM 04-504.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Supervisors must exercise caution in handling and disclosing merit award recommendations; until final approval by the President, recommendations are subject to change or retraction.

MINIMUM ADJUSTMENT

Each eligible employee deemed meritorious should be awarded a minimum merit of \$600 per year. Note that this minimum adjustment is not guaranteed based on satisfactory performance alone, performance must be deemed meritorious.

MAXIMUM ADJUSTMENT

Each merit award is limited to a maximum of 2% of an employee's base salary rate in effect as of July 1, 2026, but is not to exceed \$3,000 per year. In very limited cases, a division head in consultation with the VP for Human Resources may recommend, based on compelling justification, an award in excess of the maximum. Such recommendations will require the approval of VP for Human Resources. However, no unit or division may recommend an amount that would exceed their merit pool.

RESTRICTED AND OTHER SELF-FUNDED ACCOUNTS

Managers of restricted and other self-funded accounts, like all other areas of the institution, should follow the guidelines established by this document. Questions regarding restricted accounts may be directed to Suelema Gonzalez, Director of Grants and Contracts, at (956) 882-7716. Restricted and self-funded activities are required to cover the cost of merit awards as there is no subsidy from institutional funding.

DISTRIBUTION ACROSS FUND GROUPS AND DEPARTMENTS ALLOWED

To allow flexibility, division heads are not restricted to awarding merit in proportion to the amount computed for each fund group (E&G vs. Auxiliary, etc.). Merit shall be awarded according to employee performance and should be independent of the funding source. Furthermore, division heads may wish to reallocate merit pool funds among their departments.

ADJUSTMENTS AFTER FINALIZATION OF THE PROCESS

Changes after the process is finalized will typically not be allowed. An example of a change that would not be allowed is redistribution of merit amounts due to employee departures. Limited post-process adjustments may be considered and typically involve an extraordinary circumstance and require the approval of the President.

SUBMISSION PROCEDURE

Merit recommendation templates shall be submitted through the organizational chain of command on the forms provided no later than October 19, 2026, to Human Resources using secure email submissions. After the data is reviewed, a listing will be distributed to each division head.

QUESTIONS?

Primary contact and issue resolution should be through the organizational chain of command. However, the following individuals in the Planning and Analysis and HR offices are available for assistance.

Human Resources Contact:

Kristina Chavez, Sr. Associate Vice President HR
Compensation and Merit questions
(956) 665-5395

Kristina.Chavez@utrgv.edu

Planning and Analysis Contact:

Nidia Garcia, Assistant Director, P&A
Position questions
(956) 665-7420
PositionControl@utrgv.edu

Human Resources Contact:

Zwelky McCall, HR Business Partner
Staff Employee evaluation questions
(956) 665-3285

hreval@utrgv.edu

Health Affairs Human Resources Contact:

Jessica Garces, Employee Relations Mgr, HA
Health Affairs questions
(956) 296-1561
jessica.garces@utrgv.edu

ⁱ Eligible employees are *regular* permanent, benefits-eligible employees. This excludes waged, work-study and others who are not benefits-eligible.

ⁱⁱ UT System Operating Budget Instructions for FY 2026: Consistent with the Policies, it is expected that any pools for FY 2027 salary increases for merit, equity or other reasons are included in the Operating Budget. Funds set aside for compensation increases should be allocated within the Detail Budget to the Function Level (i.e., Instruction, Academic Support, Research, Institutional Support, etc.). Institutions may allocate salary pools to a lower level such as college or department, if desired.

ⁱⁱⁱ Eighty-eighth Legislature General Appropriations Act for the 2026-27 Biennium; Article III-288, sec. 5, subs. 4, *Merit Authorization*. “It is expressly provided that institutional administrators may grant merit salary increases to employees whose job performance and productivity is consistently above that normally expected or required”. Subs. 5 -*Merit Requirement for Faculty and Faculty Equivalent Employees of Institutions and Agencies of Higher Education*. “Notwithstanding any other provisions of this Act, salary increases for faculty or faculty equivalent employees of institutions of higher education shall be awarded on the basis of merit and performance in accepted activities. This shall not be interpreted so as to preclude salary adjustment designed to avoid salary inequities”.

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Board of Regents Budget Preparation Policies, Fiscal Year 2027: Merit Increases and Promotions - Institutions should consider available resources and resolution of any major salary inequities when implementing merit salary increases for faculty and staff. As established by Texas Education Code Section 51.962, an employee must have been employed by the institution for the six months immediately preceding the effective date of the increase to be eligible for a merit increase, and at least six months must have elapsed since the employee's last merit salary increase. These limitations also apply to one-time merit payments. Merit increases or advances in rank for faculty are to be on the basis of their professional responsibilities in teaching effectiveness, research, public service, patient care, and administration. Merit increases or promotions for administrative and professional staff and classified staff are to be based on evaluation of performance in areas appropriate to work assignments.

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Texas Education Code Sec. 51.962. MERIT SALARY INCREASES. (a) An institution of higher education as defined by Section 61.003 may grant merit salary increases, including one-time merit payments, to employees described by this section.

(b) A merit salary increase made under this section is compensation for purposes of Chapter 659, Government Code, and salary and wages and member compensation for purposes of Title 8, Government Code.

(c) An institution of higher education may pay merit salary increases under this section from any funds.

(d) Before awarding a merit salary increase under this section, an institution of higher education must adopt criteria for the granting of merit salary increases.

(e) To be eligible for a merit salary increase under this section, an employee must have been employed by the institution of higher education for the six months immediately preceding the effective date of the increase and at least six months must have elapsed since the employee's last merit salary increase.

(f) This subsection applies to an employee employed by the institution of higher education for more than six months. The requirement that six months elapse between merit salary increases prescribed by Subsection (e) does not apply to a one-time merit payment if the chief administrative officer of the institution of higher education determines in writing that the one-time merit payment is made in relation to the employee's performance during a natural disaster or other extraordinary circumstance.

Added by Acts 2001, 77th Leg., ch. 118, Sec. 2.02, eff. Sept. 1, 2001. Amended by Acts 2009, 81st Leg., R.S., Ch. 1241, Sec. 1, eff. June 19, 2009.

^{vi} Handbook of Operating Procedures (HOP) ADM 04-504, D.2.m: “Salary increases related to promotions and merit awards will require that a current and satisfactory appraisal be on file with the Office of Human Resources”. HOP ADM 06-502: D.8.a and b: “The outcome of each faculty member's annual performance evaluation will be used in determining the amount of merit awarded to the faculty member ...”, “To be eligible for merit, faculty must receive “exceeds” or “meets” expectations in the overall evaluation result.”