

Academic Affairs Policy #2
Academic Unit Heads

Date of Current Revision: April 2025

Responsible Officer: Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

1. PURPOSE

This policy provides the procedures for selecting, appointing, hiring, evaluating, and renewing academic unit heads.

2. AUTHORITY

The Board of Visitors has been authorized by the Commonwealth of Virginia to govern James Madison University. See Code of Virginia sections § 23.1-1600; § 23.1-1301. The board has delegated the authority to manage the university to the president. The establishment of policies and procedures concerning the Division of Academic Affairs has been delegated by the President to the Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs (Provost).

3. DEFINITIONS

Academic Unit

An academic department, school, or the functional equivalent, as determined by the provost.

Academic Unit Head

An academic department head or the functional equivalent of that position.

Instructional Faculty

A faculty member whose primary responsibility includes teaching, scholarly achievement, professional qualifications, and professional service.

4. APPLICABILITY

This policy applies to all academic unit heads, instructional faculty, A&P faculty, and staff in the Division of Academic Affairs.

5. POLICY

5.1 Role and Responsibilities of Academic Unit Head

The academic unit head (AUH) provides leadership to their academic unit by overseeing and managing the academic and administrative functions of the unit. The AUH Manual has an extensive list of these duties and responsibilities. Although specific AUH duties and responsibilities vary across academic units, AUHs consistently serve as:

- a. Strategic leaders responsible for advancing unit, college, and university missions and facilitating the unit's vision. They must support and advocate for faculty members,

communicate effectively with the administration and faculty, and engage with external resources and constituencies to benefit the academic unit.

- b. Advocators for student success by addressing student concerns and fostering academic achievement.
- c. Administrators, managers, and mentors who must grasp the complexities of the AUH role while considering perspectives from their dean, faculty, and students.
- d. Academics and active members of the university and their disciplinary communities. AUHs maintain effective teaching, professional visibility and growth through scholarly achievements or artistic efforts, and meaningful service to the university, their field, and the broader community.

5.2 Appointment

- a. AUHs serve five-year terms unless a shorter term is negotiated with the dean, with the provost's approval. Terms are renewable upon successful evaluation at the end of each term (see comprehensive evaluation procedures in section 6.5).
- b. AUHs are generally given fiscal year appointments (12 months from July 1 to June 30). Exceptions may be permitted by the dean, with approval from the provost.
- c. AUHs serve at the dean's discretion and may be removed from their position at any time, with the provost's approval.
- d. An AUH who wishes to resign from their administrative appointment must notify their dean as soon as possible. At least three months' notice is expected before the effective resignation date.

5.3 Salary

The AUH's salary will be negotiated between the AUH and the dean, with the provost's approval. If an AUH transitions into a 10-month faculty instructional position, the salary will be renegotiated between the AUH and the dean, with provost approval. Unless specified in the new appointment letter, the salary will not be less than 83% of the AUH's 12-month base salary. However, it may be higher if the dean, in consultation with the provost, warrants a higher salary due to the AUH taking on additional responsibilities beyond the instructional faculty role.

5.4 Faculty Status and Rank

AUHs are contracted as instructional faculty with an administrative workload assigned by their dean. Generally, AUHs are tenured associate professors or professors. Deans may appoint non-tenure-eligible or non-tenured AUHs with the approval of the provost. As instructional faculty, AUHs are afforded the rights and responsibilities of instructional faculty members as outlined in the Faculty Handbook and other policies.

5.5 Administrative Workload

AUH workloads are assigned by their dean in consultation with the AUH. AUH administrative workload may exceed 50 percent and differs across academic units, depending on the size of the unit (including the number of faculty and students), accreditation requirements, staffing support, unit-specific initiatives, and other factors

deemed appropriate by the dean. An AUH's remaining workload includes teaching, scholarly achievement and professional qualifications, and professional service. The relative weights assigned to each performance area are assigned by the dean annually, in consultation with the AUH, and documented in the AUH's Faculty Anticipated Activity Plan. Workload allocations may be renegotiated during the year under appropriate circumstances. The dean will apprise full-time unit faculty of their AUH's workload allocations at the beginning of each academic year.

5.6 Professional Development and Support

To create a supportive environment where AUHs can excel and achieve their full potential, the provost's office will collaborate with colleges to identify, facilitate, and provide regular leadership development opportunities for AUHs. Typically, the costs will be shared between the provost's office and the college to minimize the financial burden on individual departments.

6. PROCEDURES

6.1 Hiring

The selection of an AUH involves the collaboration of the academic unit's faculty, dean, and provost, as set out in section III.C.3 of the Faculty Handbook and the process (adapted) outlined in the Academic Affairs Guidelines for Recruiting and Hiring Instructional Faculty.

6.2 Promotion and Tenure Status

When AUHs are hired from outside JMU, the unit personnel advisory committee shall review and affirm their rank and tenure status before the dean makes an initial offer. When sitting AUHs are considered for promotion and/or tenure, the dean shall appoint another AUH from the college to act as the AUH in the context of the continuing AUH's promotion/tenure process.

6.3 Initial AUH Check In

Deans must meet with new AUHs during the second full semester of the AUH's term to discuss the AUH's performance and professional needs, as perceived by both the AUH and the dean.

6.4 Annual Evaluations

a. Overview

Academic Unit Heads will be evaluated annually by their dean. Annual evaluations serve multiple purposes, including, but not limited to:

1. Allowing AUHs to reflect on their performance in leading the academic unit over the past year.
2. Providing the academic unit's faculty and staff with an opportunity to provide feedback to the dean on the AUH's performance.

3. Enabling the dean to assess and communicate their evaluation of the AUH's performance during the past year.
 4. Determining whether the AUH's appointment should continue.
- b. Summary of Activities
- AUHs must provide their dean with a summary of their activities and accomplishments from the past twelve months, which will be used as the basis for their evaluation. The summary should include the previous year's goals and objectives, future goals and objectives, assigned duties and responsibilities, leadership needs of the academic unit, ongoing projects, and growth areas. These are not the only sources of information that the dean may use to evaluate the AUH's performance.
- c. Feedback from the Faculty and Staff in the Academic Unit
- The dean must solicit feedback on the performance of the AUH from the academic unit's faculty and staff. The process of collecting and disseminating this feedback should be as follows:
1. Feedback may be gathered using several modalities, including online surveys and direct communication with the dean. There must be an option to provide feedback anonymously. The feedback will be accessible only to the dean.
 2. When surveys are used to gather feedback, the College Governance Body and the Faculty Senate Shared Governance Committee may suggest questions for inclusion by the dean.
 3. The AUH under evaluation will receive an anonymized summary of the feedback. AUHs must not be given access to the raw data collected. The dean should ensure that the summary does not identify survey respondents.
 4. Feedback from the academic unit's faculty and staff should be discussed during an evaluation conference between the AUH and the dean.
- d. Annual Evaluation Completion
1. Conference with the Dean
The dean will evaluate the AUH based on feedback from the academic unit's faculty and staff, their direct experience working with the AUH, and the information provided in the AUH's summary of activities and accomplishments. Before October 1, when the dean provides the final written evaluation to the AUH, an evaluation conference should be held between the dean and the AUH to discuss the dean's assessment.
 2. Closing the Loop
The AUH should work with the dean to explore how the AUH should close the loop on the evaluation with faculty and staff in the AUH's unit. The goal of closing the loop is to ensure continued, forward-looking dialogue within the unit. Closing the loop does not require the AUH to share confidential personnel

information.

6.5 Comprehensive Evaluation

a. Overview

AUHs will undergo a comprehensive evaluation in the final year of each term. This evaluation replaces the annual evaluation and must be completed by October 1. In conjunction with the evaluation, the AUH must inform their dean of their intention to pursue another term. The comprehensive evaluation aims to support the AUH and guide the academic unit's development. Comprehensive evaluations should provide:

1. An opportunity for AUHs to consider their longer-term plans and the unit's plans, in collaboration with their dean.
2. A more thorough assessment of AUHs' strengths, weaknesses, and impact on the academic unit, while fostering further individual growth.

b. Required Comprehensive Evaluation Components

At a minimum, the following components serve as the basis for the comprehensive evaluation:

1. The AUH's curriculum vitae (provided by the AUH);
2. Previous annual evaluations (provided by the dean);
3. An expanded summary of activities, per 6.4.b. The expanded summary should include a self-assessment written by the AUH that reflects on and discusses their achievements and accomplishments related to the position's established goals and objectives, unit-specific initiatives, and growth areas during their term. The summary may also include significant activities and accomplishments not previously stated as goals and objectives. The summary should be no more than 1,000 words (provided by the AUH).
4. A brief description of projects and priorities assigned by the dean (provided by the dean);
5. A summary of the goals, objectives, and unit-specific initiatives the AUH intends for the academic unit to pursue during their next term.
6. An overview of the professional development opportunities available to and utilized by the AUH, as outlined in Section 5.6 (provided by the AUH).
7. Feedback from the academic unit's faculty and staff, as well as from others who may work closely with the AUH (e.g., other AUHs, members of a committee led by the AUH, etc.). Feedback should be collected and disseminated in a manner consistent with the instructions in 6.4.c.

c. Comprehensive Evaluation Completion

The comprehensive evaluation should be concluded in a manner consistent with 6.4.d. If the AUH's appointment is renewed, the AUH, in collaboration with their dean, should communicate the goals, objectives, and unit-specific initiatives for the next term to the faculty and staff of their academic unit.

6.6 Renewal/Nonrenewal

After the comprehensive evaluation, the dean and the AUH may agree to renew the AUH for another term, subject to the provost's approval, with the possibility of additional renewals following the same procedure outlined in this policy. Alternatively, the dean and/or AUH may decide that the AUH's service will conclude at the end of the term. If the AUH's term is not renewed, the AUH may remain in the unit as an instructional faculty member, unless the AUH has separated from the university as specified in the Faculty Handbook or negotiated a different arrangement with the dean, subject to the provost's approval.

7. RESPONSIBILITIES

All departments, offices and employees that generate, receive, or maintain public records under the terms of this policy are also responsible for compliance with Policy [1109](#) (Records Management).

8. SANCTIONS

Sanctions will be commensurate with the severity and/or frequency of the offense and may include termination of employment.

9. EXCLUSIONS

The Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs may grant exceptions to this policy in the institution's best interests.

10. INTERPRETATION

The authority to interpret this policy rests with the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs.

Previous Version: January 2013

Approved by the provost: September 2008; April 2025