POSITION DESCRIPTION GUIDELINE

It is the practice of the California State University (CSU) that a position description is provided to Staff and Management Personnel Plan (MPP) employees upon initial hire and subsequently when there is a substantial change in the essential functions of the position. In the event this guideline conflicts with a collective bargaining agreement, the collective bargaining agreement shall be controlling.

A position description serves as the foundation for many functions and activities related to successful human resources operations such as: recruitment and selection, job classification and compensation, performance appraisal, and disability accommodation.

A copy of the Position Description should be placed in an employee's official personnel file.

Templates for preparing staff and management position descriptions are available on the Classification & Compensation forms page on the HR website.

Understanding Position Descriptions

Position descriptions help employees get a sense of their job responsibilities, what's expected of them, and the standards by which they'll be evaluated. Position descriptions may also help you develop recruiting materials, and ensure consistency and equity among positions.

Position Descriptions vs. Classification Standards

Each position in your department should have a separate position description that provides details regarding the essential functions of that specific position. Be careful not to confuse position descriptions with official university Classification Standards, which are designed and maintained by CSU and shared among all 23 CSU campuses. Position descriptions differ from Classification Standards in the following ways:

- Position descriptions identify essential functions of a position to meet your departmental needs, whereas Classification Standards are official CSU documents that state general duties.
- Position descriptions are used to manage performance, whereas Classification Standards are used for classification purposes and job audits.

How to Write Position Descriptions

You should take the following steps when creating and updating position descriptions.

1. **Choose Your Method of Developing Position Descriptions**
   You can take several approaches to crafting position descriptions. Depending on your department and your style, you may choose any of the following methods:

   - Talk with employees and/or their managers about their work, soliciting their input to incorporate into your ideas about how to describe the position.
   - Draft position descriptions for your employees' jobs. Discuss your drafts with them to ensure they understand your expectations and standards for the position.
   - Ask employees to develop their own position descriptions, working in connection with the classification standards. Together with the employee, review the draft position description, making changes and additions.
   - Use the Position Description Questionnaire when creating a new position or restructuring a vacant position. Human Resources will then draft the PD for you.

2. **Review Relevant Resources**
   The following sources of data might help you develop position descriptions:

   - A Workforce Planning Analyst can provide you with helpful ideas based on his or her experience with your area and other areas on campus.
   - The latest recruiting documents for jobs may help you find language to integrate into the position description.
   - The online databases of job information created and maintained by the Department of Labor (O*Net), or the Bureau of Labor Statistics (Occupational Outlook Handbook) are also excellent resources.

3. **Think Structurally**
   It's important to think about the position structurally, rather than describing the unique qualities of the individual currently holding the position. Try the following tactics:

   - Think broadly in terms of outcomes, responsibilities and accountabilities, rather than simply listing tasks and duties.
   - Cluster responsibilities into broad functional areas, such as project management, customer contact, supervisory responsibilities, etc.
   - List activities or tasks underneath each broad functional area.

4. **Write Behaviorally**
   Since position descriptions will be used to monitor and evaluate employees, write them behaviorally with action verbs. You should do the following:

   - Begin each task-oriented sentence with an action verb (i.e., analyze, coordinate, plan).
   - Be as specific as possible when describing tasks and responsibilities, using the following right and wrong examples for guidance:

     - Wrong: "Be professional"
     - Right: "Observes work rules and practices covered during the orientation process concerning punctuality and breaks"

- Wrong: "Provide good customer service"
- Right: "Meets agreed-upon deadlines for faculty members with established two-week deadline for submission"
- Wrong: "Maintain acceptable interpersonal relationships"
- Right: "Participate in sectional and cross-functional groups and teams and evaluated with a peer assessment quarterly or at the end of the project"

5. **Constantly Update and Assess**
   In the spirit of continuous improvement and process review, position descriptions should constantly evolve based on emerging priorities or shifts in organizational and departmental needs.

   Be sure to regularly assess and update position descriptions in the following ways:

   - Let employees know that their position descriptions are always subject to change.
   - Ensure that employees understand the difference between their Classification Standard and their position description—although it may be valid when someone says "That's not in my position description," it may indeed be in their classification standard.
   - Review position descriptions when you discuss the performance expectations and development plans for the coming year with employees.
   - If changes identified in your annual plan involve fundamental additions or deletions to the existing functions described in position descriptions, you may need to incorporate those changes into your employees' position descriptions.

The draft position description should be submitted to your Workforce Planning Analyst for a final review, revision (if necessary) and approval. Once approved, the employee, work lead (if applicable) and employee will sign the document.