



**A REPORT FROM THE  
REVIEW COMMITTEE FOR JOB EVALUATION**

**JULY 2011**

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# Introduction

## Background

In December 2009, the Dare to Transform Task Force, a group formed to recommend a review of administrative efficiencies, made a recommendation to Strategic Initiatives Group (SIG) to advance a review of the job design and evaluation processes. This review would be conducted based on consultation with several campus stakeholders. The job design and evaluation challenges that were identified included:

- evaluation turn-around time;
- disconnects in compensation expectations;
- job evaluation inconsistencies;
- the appeal process; and,
- job description development process and job design within client units and departments.

The Review Committee for Job Evaluation was established as a result of this recommendation with the mandate and membership outlined below.

Also of relevance, to address the challenges around the job evaluation system, the University of Alberta and the Non-Academic Staff Association agreed during the 2009 round of negotiations to initiate a review of the Non-Academic Job Evaluation System. The joint committee under Article 17 of the NASA agreement conducted the review and completed its work in the Fall of 2010. The recommendations of the joint committee are referenced throughout this report and are attached as the Appendix. Together with changes in the processes of job evaluation recommended in this report, these undertakings will improve the performance of the job evaluation system.

## Committee's Mandate

The Task Force recommended that the Vice President (Finance and Administration) establish a committee, and to include members from within and external to the job evaluation group, which would establish terms of reference, conduct further review, and recommend improvements to increase the efficiency of the job design and evaluation processes.

## Committee Membership

1. Phyllis Clark, VP (Finance and Administration), Chair of Committee.
2. Anita Molzahn, Dean, Nursing - Dean Representative.
3. Michael Caldwell, Chair, Biological Sciences - Chair Representative.
4. Jonathan Schaeffer, Vice-Provost & AVP Information Technology - Provost's Office.
5. Chris Cheeseman, Vice-Provost & AVP Human Resources.

6. Julie McClelland, Assistant Dean Administration, Faculty of Science.
7. Bart Becker, Associate Vice-President, Facilities and Operations.
8. Vivien Wulff, Chief Operating Officer, Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry.
9. Marion Haggarty France, University Secretary, University Governance.

## Committee Support

Internal subject matter resources from Human Resource Services:

1. Dan Charlton, Director, Human Resource Consulting Services.
2. Donna Nordstrom, Manager, Compensation, Job Design & Recruitment.
3. Tyler Kuhnert, Administrative Coordinator, Human Resource Consulting Services.

External resources:

4. Michael Lim and Joan Lim of Lim HR Compensation Consulting.

## Committee's Terms of Reference

At its July 29, 2010 meeting, the Committee identified the following as its terms of reference and expectations:

1. Review the job design and evaluation processes for Support Staff, Administrative Professional Officers (regular and temporary), Trust Academic Staff, and Faculty Service Officers.
2. Review the processes in the Faculties and Departments regarding job design and evaluation.
3. Review the tie to compensation.
4. Review the appeals process.
5. Produce a report for Strategic Initiatives Group (SIG) and Executive Planning Committee (EPC) with recommendations on:
  - a. *Process improvements* to the current job evaluation practices;
  - b. *Communication and Educational tools* designed to support leaders, managers and supervisors with job evaluation;
  - c. *Major issues* that are outside of the job evaluation process and this Committee's mandate, but have an impact on the institution.

## Defining Job Evaluation

The Committee began by attempting to define job evaluation and asked the external consultant to provide context and an overview of what job evaluation is and what can be considered as best practice around job evaluation. The external consultant gave a presentation to the Committee and extensive discussion was held on what falls under the parameters of job evaluation.

Job evaluation is simply defined as “a systematic process for determining the *relative value* of a series of jobs within an organization.” In examining this definition closely, we find meaning in the following key words:

- “Jobs” – it is concerned with jobs, not the people doing the jobs. It therefore does not consider performance evaluation, skills, abilities or the potential of individuals.
- “Systematic Process” – the evaluation of a job follows a systematic and rigorous series of steps to minimize subjectivity.
- “Relative Value” – it is concerned with internal equity, or fairness between jobs within an organization. External equity and market pay are separate issues and processes.
- “Organization” – job evaluation is confined to the value of a job within an organization. Similar jobs in another organization might be valued differently.

In all cases, the outcome of a job evaluation plan is an internal rank order of jobs within an organization that provides the basis for establishing a fair and equitable pay structure.

This table summarizes what job evaluation is and what it is not.

Job Evaluation IS...	Job Evaluation IS NOT...
• About the job	About the person doing the job
• A measure of job value	A measure of performance
• Used to set internal equity	About external competitiveness
• Confined to value within an organization	How other organizations might value similar jobs
• A process	A manual
• Participative and consultative	A small backroom committee
• An art	An exact science

# Common Themes Discussed

## Attraction and Retention

One of the most mission critical issues for the University of Alberta is our ability to attract and retain talented people at all levels of the organization in a competitive labour market. The competition for talented people is expected to intensify as the economy recovers and as demographic challenges associated with an aging workforce become more pronounced.

The Committee noted that many of the pressures on our job evaluation system arise from the challenges facing leaders and managers across the institution in attracting the talented staff we need to achieve our goals. However, while these pressures are real, recruitment and retention is not a primary role or function of job evaluation; job evaluation is designed primarily to ensure internal job equity by ranking positions internally with each other on an equitable and consistent basis to build a solid foundation for a compensation system. Using the job evaluation process as the primary method for bolstering recruitment and retention can seriously jeopardize the integrity of an organization's job evaluation system and compensation plan. It can lead to a checker-board of different pay systems that is disjointed and inequitable.

It is also important to keep things in perspective: in a very competitive job market, the university has a strong track record of retaining talented staff. In support of this, note that statistics show that average turnover in Canadian Public Sector organizations ranges from 12% to 24%. University of Alberta statistics for support staff and APOs show an average turnover (employees who may have left for other employment opportunities) of 4.3% over the last 5 years.

## Misunderstanding of Job Evaluation

Job evaluation is just one piece of an organization's overall compensation strategy. Unfortunately, there are misunderstandings of the purpose of job evaluation and the job evaluation process is often used to address human resource issues for which it is not designed, such as the following:

1. Paying competitive market rates. As previously indicated, this is a separate issue and process where periodic labour market analyses are conducted to identify trends and ensure that the organization's pay rates are competitive on an overall basis with the appropriate peer comparators in the external market. These market checks are conducted on a broad basis every three to four years and with specific jobs or groups of jobs on an ongoing basis. Issues of external competitiveness are typically addressed through institution-wide strategies (eg. negotiated increases through collective bargaining/negotiations) or through market supplements, rather than through the job evaluation process (see the next section).
2. Providing "promotions" for staff staying in the same unit with no significant change to their role nor responsibilities, rather than encouraging movement around the institution.

3. Paying for performance to recognize and reward individual contributions.
4. Rewarding staff financially for seniority or service longevity within the organization, especially once the incumbent is “maxed-out” in an assigned pay range, by striving to increase the evaluation level of the position without significant change to the role.
5. Paying for personal characteristics such as the education, experience, or competencies of a person, as opposed to what is required for the job.

As a consequence, the focus often becomes the *person* doing the job rather than the *position* and its core responsibilities. While it is understandable that managers would seek to recruit, retain and reward excellent staff, using the job evaluation process for this purpose can give rise to inequities, complaints, high volume of job evaluation requests, and eventually the integrity of the job evaluation system is threatened.

## **The Internal and External Equity Dichotomy**

When dealing with a variety of compensation issues and the question of salary appropriateness, it is important to identify the difference between internal and external equity issues.

**Internal equity** refers to whether people are paid fairly relative to each other within the organization. An examination of internal equity is typically the cornerstone for developing and administering any compensation program, and is widely recognized as best practice among public and private sector organizations in Canada. Internal equity is examined and assessed through the use of a job evaluation tool to evaluate and rank the relative value of positions, and to identify problems with respect to internal equity.

**External equity**, on the other hand, deals with whether people are paid fairly relative to the marketplace. External equity is assessed through surveys and other tools that compare benchmark jobs with those in the external market to establish or ascertain the organization’s competitive position relative to the defined pay market. This is done only after the internal rank order of jobs is properly established.

In approaching any overall compensation review, the standard best practice work plan is typically divided into these two major components: the internal equity review, and the external equity review. Different tools and methodologies are used to assess each of these compensation concerns. For this reason, the two are examined in isolation initially, but the findings of both are eventually merged to form a basis for drawing conclusions and making recommendations on a pay structure that is fair and equitable. In the end, a balanced consideration of the internal and external equity factors forms an important part of the compensation review process.

As previously mentioned, the University’s Compensation and Job Design Unit conducts external market surveys and analyses for benchmark jobs periodically to assess and maintain the general competitiveness of the University’s pay rates. Informal market checks on specific jobs are also conducted where the need is justifiable.

## **Internal Equity is a Core Value for the University of Alberta**

The Committee recognizes that the University, as a single employer, requires a sound job evaluation methodology which produces consistent job evaluation results and maintains overall internal equity across the institution. In other words, similar jobs across the institution should be paid similarly. Job evaluation or internal equity is therefore the foundation for developing and administering the University's base pay program.

While the University is made up of many different faculties, departments and administrative units, the Committee affirms that the institution is and should act as a single employer. There is significant pressure from several areas that want to design and implement distinct unit level compensation strategies, an approach that presents numerous challenges and risks to the institution.

The Committee also acknowledges the disproportionate distribution of financial resources between the "have" and "have-not" faculties and departments across campus, and that their different salary budget capacities to undertake job reviews also contributes to the perceived inequitable evaluation treatment and pay between the "rich" and "poor" areas.

## **Volume of Job Evaluation Requests**

In previous years, the total volume of job evaluation requests was between 1,400 and 1,600 annually. The high volume of job evaluation reviews indicated that 23% of university employees (1,600 out of a total of 7,000 employees that come under the purview of Compensation and Job Design) were submitting evaluation requests in a given year. As a benchmark comparison, Capital Health (approximately 30,000 employees) was surveyed for the same time period, and reported that they evaluated approximately 700 positions in 2008 compared to 1,640 at the University of Alberta (approximately 13,000 employees). The committee noted that the high volume of evaluations may be attributed to the ongoing recruitment and retention pressures facing the institution.

The number of support staff evaluations has reduced recently, partially as a result of a new language in the NASA collective agreement that disallows a job evaluation request within 36 months from last review, unless there are significant changes. This has stopped the practice by some groups of submitting job evaluation requests on an annual basis.

Over the last two year period, approximately 930 position evaluations have been conducted each year.

## **Accountability for Job Evaluation**

An underlying and fundamental issue is the accountability question. Currently, the accountability for the integrity of Academic and Support Staff job evaluation rests fully with the Compensation and Job Design Unit of Human Resource Consulting Services. What role do the departments and senior administration play in maintaining the integrity of the job evaluation system? The Committee agreed that managers have a key role in the job evaluation process, including managing expectations and taking a lead role in writing or updating job descriptions. It is important that this be done in a timely, objective, and collaborative manner, encouraging input from staff. In support of this, necessary and appropriate education, communication and tools need to be provided.



# Specific Issues & Recommendations

The Committee believes that there are a number of actions that the Compensation and Job Design Unit and the wider institution can take to improve the functioning of the job evaluation system. We also recognize that the University of Alberta faces a number of challenges related to attracting and retaining talented staff that cannot be addressed through the job evaluation process, but do need attention.

As outlined in the Terms of Reference, these issues and recommendations fall under three main categories: Process Improvements; Communication and Educational Tools; and Major Issues Outside of this Committee's Mandate.

## 1. Process Improvements

### a. Current Job Evaluation Plans

The committee discussed the possibility of revamping the current job evaluation plans for APO and Support staff, or possibly replacing them with new plans. The Committee noted that designing and implementing new plans requires a heavy investment of time, staff and financial resources for a period that may span up to three years. In addition, the Aiken and Hay job evaluation plans used by the University are point factor plans that are fundamentally similar to other point factor plans used by 70% of Canadian organizations surveyed by Watson Wyatt in 2006. These and similar plans are widely used in the public sector across Alberta and Canada, especially among the "MASH" sectors, which encompass municipalities, advanced education, schools, and the healthcare organizations. While opinions vary about the relative merits of different job evaluation plans, all have both strengths and weaknesses and all do essentially the same things. It is acknowledged that major job evaluation projects can be disruptive, and require a high level of senior management support and political appetite to deal with the organizational upheaval and cost associated with the introduction of new plans. On balance, the Committee believes the costs of replacing the University's job evaluation plans would outweigh any potential benefits. We note that the Article 17 Committee reached the same conclusion with respect to the Aiken plan.

On a related note, in part because the University uses different job evaluation plans for APOs and support staff, the area of overlap between the two pay structures can present challenges. In a few cases compression issues have emerged where the gap between the salaries of APO managers and the support staff who report to them is very small. The compression between high-level support staff and APO positions is an issue that should be reviewed by the Compensation and Job Design unit directly with the departments experiencing compression.

**Recommendation: While the current job evaluation plans do not need to be replaced, the Committee does recommend that the existing plans need some refinement to meet today's needs. We endorse the Article 17 Committee's approach to refining the Aiken**

**Plan as outlined in Recommendation #3 on page 14 of the Article 17 report. We also indicate specific Aiken Plan improvements in later recommendations of this Report.**

**As part of the maintenance of the current job evaluation plans, regular reviews by external consultants should be conducted to ensure appropriate application of the plans.**

## **b. Job Descriptions and Benchmarks**

The writing of the job descriptions can be a challenge and struggle for both managers and staff. It has been described as onerous, time-consuming and a task that can create political turmoil. Managers have difficulty finding time to write job descriptions among their many competing priorities. They may also not be clear about how best to capture the responsibilities, scope and impact of a position, or how to manage and balance expectations. The Committee suggested that a more extensive use of benchmarks, or sample job descriptions/fact sheets, could help streamline the process of drafting descriptions, provide guidance and promote a better understanding of the job evaluation plan and process. **We note that the Article 17 committee reached a similar conclusion with respect to the Aiken Plan.**

While the staff agreements refer to the writing of job descriptions as a joint and consultative process, the Committee feels it is vital that management take both leadership and ownership of the job description writing process, based on the fundamental principle that the position is owned by the institution and not the incumbent.

**Recommendation: A comprehensive set of benchmark jobs for users should be developed, to serve as meaningful anchors and reference points. This Committee supports the recommendations made by the Article 17 Committee in Recommendation #1 of its Report.**

## **c. Educational-Credential Requirements**

Under the Aiken Plan, minimum educational requirements must be specified and evaluated as one of the key factors for evaluation of support staff positions. Disagreements about the appropriate level or qualification for evaluation purposes often arise and are counterproductive. While the minimum qualifications in a job fact sheet do not restrict the ability to stipulate preferred qualifications in the recruitment process, debate about minimum qualifications for evaluation purposes persists. In an institution that puts a high value on educational credentials, this is understandable but the University faces risks if minimum academic qualifications are set for a job that are either higher than industry norms or are unwarranted in terms of *bona-fide* occupational requirements. In addition to creating inconsistencies across the campus, the University may also be at risk for being challenged from a human rights perspective unless it can defend the minimum education requirement as a *bona fide* occupational requirement.

The Committee noted that the Hay Plan does not have an “Education” factor and instead focuses on “knowledge and “expertise”. This appears to work well and it is no coincidence

that disputes about minimum qualifications are rare in APO evaluations. In effect, the emphasis on educational qualifications in the Aiken plan serves no real purpose and leads to unnecessary disputes.

**Recommendation:** In order to alleviate the pressures as described, design a “Knowledge” or “Expertise” factor to replace the Education and Experience factors in the Aiken Plan . This Committee supports the recommendations made by the Article 17 Committee in Recommendation #4 of its Report.

#### **d. Alternative Delivery Mechanisms for Job Evaluation**

The Committee discussed two options: outsourcing and co-sourcing.

The outsourcing option would be a significant departure from current practice and highly unusual in a public sector organization that puts significant value on internal equity. Our external consultant indicated that outsourcing of the job evaluation process is extremely rare among comparable organizations and in the few instances where it has been tried, has not been considered a success. This option would be costly and a number of stakeholders including the staff association and union would have concerns.

Under the co-sourcing option, a small portion of evaluation requests may be assigned to an external consulting firm. Essentially, this option provides an extra pair of hands from an external consultant who has expertise and experience with the Aiken and Hay job evaluation methodologies, and develops an understanding of the university culture. The external consultant would work closely with Compensation and Job Design to ensure that standards and consistency are maintained. The external consultant is able to evaluate the assigned positions with a potentially faster turnaround time, and would be at arms-length and less susceptible to internal pressures.

**Recommendation:** The Committee endorses the co-sourcing option as described. Parameters will be established for the terms and conditions of use and associated costs.

#### **e. Job Evaluation Appeal**

The Committee reviewed the appeal processes and report of the Article 17 joint committee review. It was concluded that the job evaluation appeal processes as outlined in the collective agreements are functioning appropriately.

**Recommendation:** No action required.

#### **f. Job Evaluation Turnaround**

The turn-around time for job evaluation has been identified as a concern and the Committee noted that the Compensation & Job Design unit has at times faced challenges in keeping up with volumes. We also note that the situation has improved significantly as a result of several factors, including re-organization of work in the unit, collective agreement changes and other process improvements. The current standard of 10 business days for vacant positions and 3

months for encumbered positions is reasonable given available resources and is in line with industry standards, though we encourage continuing improvements and streamlining of centrally administered processes in a number of our recommendations.

The Committee acknowledges that turnaround times are also affected by processes within the departments. The Article 17 Committee (as part of its Review) conducted focus group sessions with managers and support staff; participants identified significant turnaround issues within their units where the job descriptions are written and signed off. We believe strategies that support department managers and staff at the “front end” of the evaluation process (eg. benchmarks, enhanced education) can have a significant positive impact on overall timeliness and efficiency.

**Recommendation:** To improve the tracking process, an email confirming receipt for support staff evaluations has already been implemented as recommended by this Committee. The Committee recognizes the importance of timelines and recommends further technological enhancements to the tracking and evaluation of positions be implemented.

## **2. Communication and Education Tools**

The Committee believes enhanced communication and education, about the University’s job evaluation system can contribute to the process improvements described above. The Committee discussed and agreed on these two general approaches:

### **a. Education on Compensation and Job Design**

Given the misunderstandings about the job evaluation system noted earlier, there is clearly a need for more education for managers and staff. Compensation & Job Design does offer training, including customized delivery for clients in particular units, as well as more general offerings. However, the number of staff and units accessing these opportunities is relatively small. A concerted effort to promote and maximize the effectiveness of educational opportunities and to develop new tools (such as a Compensation 101 program, lunch and learn sessions and QandA segments on the website) could significantly improve the process.

**Recommendation:** Compensation & Job Design should work to increase awareness on campus of the current customized, unit level training available and also develop new formats of delivery to ensure a wide audience is reached. The unit should proactively contact faculties and departments to discuss education and training options. We note that the Article 17 Report reached a similar conclusion and this Committee endorses Recommendation #2 on page 13 of the Article 17 Report.

## **b. Communication about Best Practices in Job Evaluation**

Compensation & Job Design should play a lead role in identifying and communicating best practices and principles on job evaluation from a faculty and department perspective, including information about the following:

- Job evaluation as a management driven process.
- The importance for managers of conducting the difficult and courageous conversations with staff and managing expectations.
- The supports and guidance available to managers to ensure that potentially difficult situations and staff expectations are being managed appropriately.
- The advantages of routing all job evaluation requests through a central clearing area within the faculty or department as a check for proper documentation and consistency before submitting them to Compensation & Job Design.
- The importance of looking at jobs within their wider context rather than evaluating one position in isolation from others in a unit to minimize inequity issues that may arise.
- Keeping job descriptions current.
- Working closely and proactively with the Compensation & Job Design Consultant and the HR Consultant.

**Recommendation:** Develop a checklist of “best practices” as identified by this Committee to be used as part of an educational toolkit to be available on the HRS website.

## **3. Major Issues Outside of Committee’s Mandate**

At various points in this report the Committee has identified important issues that are outside of our mandate but need to be addressed. These issues relate more or less directly to recruitment and retention challenges facing University leaders, managers and supervisors and the institution as a whole. It is vital that these challenges are dealt with through appropriate processes.

### **a. Career Mobility**

A number of factors hinder career mobility within our institution. We are most concerned about practices that focus on retention of staff within individual units rather than at the University as a whole. If staff members are not aware of the career paths open to them across campus and are not encouraged or supported in developing their careers by moving to other roles and units, they may focus instead on improving their situation in ways that put undue pressure on the job evaluation system. The Committee believes we need to shift the culture to one that actively encourages career mobility across departments and retention of talented staff at the University rather than in particular units. We strongly encourage the development of strategies that will foster a robust career development culture and processes at the University.

## **b. Strategies for Addressing Market Pressures**

### **Compensation Philosophy and Policy:**

Unlike other major employers, the University does not have an explicit compensation philosophy and policy that would guide compensation decisions. A compensation philosophy sets the guiding principles for base pay, benefits and working conditions and outlines the course of action that determines compensation decisions for the organization, including: definition of the pay market and relevant peer comparator group; and a definition of the competitive position – at what level are we willing to pay?

The absence of explicit policy in this area leads to uncertainty about institutional priorities and expectations and a lack of transparency. This undermines trust and adds pressure on the job evaluation system as particular units press for unit-specific compensation strategies and outcomes.

### **Market Supplements:**

Market supplements are a key method for addressing recruitment or retention challenges on a case by case basis in a manner that preserves the integrity of the job evaluation system. In other words, they are a way of achieving external equity without undermining internal equity. However the current process is not well understood across campus and lacks transparency and clarity about purposes, roles and responsibilities. Further, we believe that there may be potential issues/risks around the application of market supplements for support staff. The Committee believes the process should be reviewed to address these issues and that the purposes and functioning of the process should be more clearly articulated.

### **Rewards and Recognition:**

A large percentage of University staff, approximately 45% of Regular APOs and 36% of Regular/Auxiliary Support Staff are at the top of their salary range and cannot be financially rewarded for outstanding performance through the existing increment system. The absence of such mechanisms can lead to increased pressure on the job evaluation system. The Committee believes this specific issue needs to be dealt with as part of a broader review of the University's rewards and recognition strategies.

**Recommendation:** A process or processes should be established to address the issues relating to recruitment and retention of talented staff. We note that the Human Resource Services strategic plan is currently being reviewed in consultation with all key constituent groups. This may provide an ideal opportunity to consider such issues and to identify strategies for addressing them. We also recommend that Compensation & Job Design initiate another APO and support staff external market survey in 2012 (the last one was conducted in 2009) to ensure the salaries at the University of Alberta are competitive. Finally, the Committee recommends that regular assessments be conducted to determine average U of A turnover rates as compared to industry standard.

## Closing Statement

We have recommended a variety of strategies for improving the job evaluation process and for addressing broader recruitment and retention issues facing the University of Alberta. The Committee believes that these recommendations can lead to significant positive change. Much of this work necessarily falls to the Compensation and Job Design Unit. However, the job evaluation system cannot function optimally unless all constituent groups, staff members, leaders and managers across the institution take responsibility for the integrity and effective functioning of that system.

We recognize that this is an area where the fundamental interests of individuals and groups are affected and where complete objectivity can be elusive. This is natural when you consider that the process has a direct bearing on individual staff members' salaries (and perceptions of how they are valued relative to others) and managers' ability to recruit and retain the very best staff. It is not surprising that job evaluation processes tend to generate controversy, here at the U of A and in most large organizations. It is also natural that everyone affected – staff, managers and evaluators – have personal opinions about how the process should work and what equity means. In order to maintain the integrity of the University of Alberta's job evaluation system, it is important to encourage all stakeholders to balance their own interests and perspectives with those of the wider institution; by doing this together, we can all play our part in supporting an effective, transparent and equitable job evaluation system.

## Next Steps & Timelines

Summary of Recommendations	Target Timelines
1. Disseminate report to campus community (SIG, EPC, Admin Strategic Council, etc)	Fall 2011
2. Fine-tune current job evaluation plans	March 31, 2012
3. Develop benchmarks	Project initiated; ongoing to December 31, 2012
4. Revise education and experience factor to a knowledge factor	March 31, 2012
5. Contract external consultant(s) to conduct a review/audit of the application of the job evaluation plans	June 30, 2012
6. Adopt co-sourcing as a delivery mechanism option to augment internal HR resources in job evaluation and writing of job descriptions	March 31, 2012
7. Develop a Best Practice checklist.	December 31, 2011
8. Identify strategies for creating committees to address issues identified in Recommendation #3 (Major Issues Outside of Committee's Mandate)	To be determined by SIG, EPC and HR



# APPENDIX

- **Article 17 Committee: A Report on the Review of the Non-Academic Job Evaluation System** (Lim HR Compensation Consulting) – *20 pages*

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2-sided printing/page-turns*

# *Appendix to RCJE Report*



## **A REPORT ON THE REVIEW OF THE NON-ACADEMIC JOB EVALUATION SYSTEM**

**SUBMITTED BY**

**LIM HR COMPENSATION CONSULTING**

**AUGUST 3, 2010**

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## Introduction

### Background

In 1989, the University of Alberta adopted and implemented a customized version of KPMG's *Aiken Plan*, which contains nine widely-used factors with point values as the standard job evaluation methodology for evaluating and grading all non-academic staff positions. As with other job evaluation plans, the primary goal of the plan is to ensure internal equity through the establishment of a job worth hierarchy that reflects the relative ranking of all non-academic staff positions in an objective, consistent and transparent manner across the University.

This job evaluation plan has been in place for twenty-one years. In 2001, the University and the Non-Academic Staff Association (NASA) jointly agreed to review the plan by engaging the services of an external consultant to conduct a quality assurance review to determine if the plan was being applied in a consistent manner by examining the evaluations of representative jobs, which included 35 benchmark jobs and 30 "live" jobs, selected jointly by the Employer and the Association. While there have been some minor and occasional changes to the process, the job evaluation plan, in terms of its structure and design, remains virtually the same as it was in 1989.

### Mandate

In March of 2010, representatives of the Joint Committee on Job Evaluation System requested Lim HR Compensation Consulting to assist the parties in conducting an independent review of the Non-Academic Job Evaluation System, including the facilitation of focus group sessions, which would form a critical part of the consultation process with the stakeholders. Such a review is a normal operating procedure for any evaluation plan and process in order to maintain the integrity of the job evaluation system.

The mandate for this review arose from the 2009-2012 round of negotiations between the University of Alberta and the Non-Academic Staff Association (NASA), when the Joint Committee on Job Evaluation System under Article 17 was charged with the task of conducting a review of the Non-Academic Job Evaluation System in accordance with the provisions of "Appendix B, Letter of Understanding" as follows:

*"While the Employer is responsible for establishing and maintaining a job evaluation system covering employees within the jurisdiction of the Union, it is recognized through Article 17 that both parties have a vested interest in ensuring an effective job evaluation system exists."*

# Appendix to RCJE Report

*As the Union and the Employer believe the job evaluation system is a critical component of ensuring appropriate compensation and internal equity of positions, the parties agree to assign the Joint Committee on Job Evaluation System (as established in Article 17) with the task of reviewing the Non-Academic Job Evaluation System.*

*The purpose of the review is to formulate and provide recommendations on necessary changes to:*

- 1. the job evaluation system*
- 2. the job evaluation process*

*This review will be conducted keeping in mind the principle that the prime function of a job evaluation system is to ensure internal equity through creating a job worth hierarchy in an objective, consistent and transparent manner across the University for positions within the Agreement.*

*Any recommendations from the Committee should:*

- *Support the University's mission, vision and values*
- *Promote positive working relationships across the University*
- *Clarify and simplify processes*
- *Consider previous committee decisions or recommendations since the establishment of the current system*
- *Take into consideration input from the University community*
- *Ensure internal equity remains a paramount consideration in the system and processes*
- *Ensure the integrity of the job evaluation system and processes*
- *Ensure the independence of the evaluation decision*
- *Be fiscally responsible including an exploration of the potential benefits and costs of any recommendations*
- *Include suggestions for implementation*

*The Committee will present a report and recommendations to the parties within 18 months of the ratification of this Agreement."*

The rest of this report details the consultant's approach, findings, conclusions and recommendations.

## Our Approach

### Initial preparations

The consultants met initially with the two principals representing the parties<sup>1</sup> in late March 2010 to gain an understanding of the assignment, discuss the general approach, and prepare a “game plan” on conducting focus group sessions which would be presented to and discussed with the Article 17 Committee.

Subsequently, the consultants met with the Article 17 Committee on April 17, 2010 to discuss the proposed work plan and receive the Committee’s suggested changes, which were incorporated into the presentation and survey questionnaires for focus group participants. The logistics of selecting focus group participants for the various sessions, to be conducted at different times and locations, were coordinated by the two principals representing the University and NASA.

We also carefully reviewed all materials provided to the consultant including the following:

- Compensation & Job Design Facts, November 2009.
- Articles 15, 16, 17 and Appendix B – Letter of Understanding of the U of A / NASA collective agreement, pertaining to the job evaluation process, Job Fact Sheet, Appeals, and the job evaluation review mandate.
- March 26, 2010 Letter from Donna Nordstrom and Kathy Collins inviting community participation in focus group sessions.
- The Aiken Plan for Job Evaluation Manual.
- Significant Changes to a Job Fact Sheet - Defined.
- Job Evaluation Forms.

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<sup>1</sup> The two principals were Donna Nordstrom, Manager, Compensation, Job Design & Recruitment from the University, and Kathy Collins, Labour Relations Officer, from the Non-Academic Staff Association (NASA).

## Focus group sessions

Based on the review mandate outlined above in “Appendix B - Letter of Understanding”, the two principals representing the parties<sup>2</sup> sent a joint letter, dated March 26, 2010, to the university community inviting participation in *“focus groups across campus in order to collect feedback from the University community’s perspective regarding the job evaluation process and the Aiken Plan.”*

This invitation letter also indicated their plan to:

- target diverse groups of participants from Faculties and Central Administrative units,
- conduct separate sessions for support staff and managers, and
- start the focus group sessions in late spring or early summer.

The focus group sessions formed a critical part of the review and data gathering process, designed to obtain qualitative in-depth information on perceptions, insights, attitudes, experiences or beliefs about the job evaluation system. Each focus group session was a perception audit where representative participant stakeholders responded to open-ended questions, and offered their perceptions about the job evaluation plan and the process in a comfortable and permissive environment during the two-hours allocated to each session.

The consultants conducted a total of eight focus group sessions between May 30<sup>th</sup> and June 14<sup>th</sup> 2010 for a total of sixteen hours of consultation. Three sessions were held for managers and five for support staff. Each focus group had between six to nine participants. In total, there were 24 management participants, and 35 support staff participants, for a total of 59 participants. Attendees participated fully and freely in the discussion.

In conducting the focus group interviews, the consultants developed and used a series of open-ended questions to guide each of the two-hour group discussions. The questions were designed to create an atmosphere of informality within a structured framework to gain participants’ perspectives on the job evaluation plan and process. The interview questions are included in **Appendix A** of this report.

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<sup>2</sup> See footnote 1.



## Survey questionnaire

As a supplement to the qualitative information gathered through the focus groups, the consultants also collected quantitative data by asking participants to respond to a survey questionnaire which asked participants to rate their responses to eleven statements about the job evaluation system where (1) indicated total disagreement and (10) indicated total agreement. We had a very high participation rate of 91.5% where fifty four out of fifty nine participants provided responses to the survey questionnaire. These survey questions are included in **Appendix B** of this report.

## Data analysis

The consultants took considerable effort and time in compiling and analyzing the qualitative data that was collected through extensive notes taken from all the focus groups sessions, as well as the quantitative data obtained from the survey questionnaire. Based on the analysis of the two types of data, we summarize the findings, identify common themes, and present our main conclusions with recommendations in the following report.

## Findings

### Focus group findings

The following are the high level summaries of the focus group responses and discussions on the job evaluation (JE) questions.

**1. What do you think is the main purpose of a JE Plan?**

Most participants recognize that the main purpose of any job evaluation plan is to establish internal equity among various positions, but many believe that job evaluation is a tool to address competitive market pay rates, performance evaluation and pay, career laddering, and succession planning.

**2. Is the University's JE Plan well documented?**

Most participants agree that the plan is well documented and easily accessible on the university's website, but express concerns that the plan is "bureaucratic", vague, difficult to understand, and subject to different interpretations. While some participants commented about difficulties in navigating the website, a surprising number of participants (mainly support staff) have not seen the plan and are unaware that the plan is published on the university's website.

**3. Are you aware of the factors used to evaluate a support staff position?**

There is general awareness of some or most of the factors used in the job evaluation plan, although a few participants are not aware of the factors.

**4. What are your views on the JE factors? Are they relevant or appropriate to the university?**

Most participants feel that the factors are still relevant but express concerns about the subjectivity of the language used in the factors. There is the belief that one needs to find the right "buzz" words and phrases to get a higher grade. Some also feel that increased work volume should be a factor in job evaluation, particularly in relation to downsizing, doing more with less, and the requirement for more skills and knowledge. Some are open to exploring the possibility of combining the education and experience factors into a new knowledge factor.

- 5. Using Complexity-Judgment and Independence of Action as examples of the factors used in the job evaluation plan, what are your views on the definitions used to distinguish between rank levels of the factors?<sup>3</sup>**

The factor definitions of the rank levels are “wafer thin”, unclear, subjective, and very difficult to distinguish and work with. There are too many rank levels in the two examples used. The current multi-layered levels should be collapsed to perhaps four or five levels with definitions that are clearer, distinct, and more useful.

- 6. What are your thoughts on the timelines for the job evaluation process? Within the department and within Central HR?**

Generally speaking, the participants felt that any timeline delays rest mainly at the department level where delays range from weeks, to months, to years, for many reasons such as reorganization, workload priorities, trepidation about writing JFS, procrastination, fear of position downgrade, poor supervisor and employee commitment to writing the JFS, and internal disagreement between employees and supervisors on what should be included in the JFS. Sometimes the delays are attributed to Central HR when it requests the review of other related jobs in a work unit rather than evaluating a position in isolation, thereby putting the position under review on hold.

- 7. What should be the turnaround time, once the request is received by Central Human Resources?**

The current target turnaround times of 10 business days for new or vacant positions and 3 months for occupied positions are widely seen as reasonable by participants.

- 8. Do you think that the Job Fact Sheets are monitored and changes acted upon in a timely manner?**

Generally, the answer is negative due to resource and capacity issues. The opportunity to monitor the currency of the JFS during the annual performance appraisal is not consistently used or acted upon.

- 9. What is your understanding about the job evaluation appeal process?**

The process is clearly outlined in the collective agreement and on the HR website although some are not even aware of this. Overall, those who have experienced the appeal process indicate that this process works well.

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<sup>3</sup> See Appendix A for examples of the rank definitions used in the focus groups.

# Appendix to RCJE Report

**10. In your opinion, what are the strengths of the current job evaluation system?**

- It provides a standard to ensure equity and consistency across campus
- The factors are widely used in other organizations
- Provides a good process that supports evaluation decisions and appeals
- The plan is documented on the website and therefore quite transparent
- The plan accommodates evaluation of a variety of jobs across campus
- Arms-length evaluations by central HR helps ensure consistency
- Provides for employee participation in the process
- A general belief that the plan is consistently applied for the most part

**11. In your opinion, what are the weaknesses of the current job evaluation system?**

- Language used in the plan is vague and subjective
- Inconsistent application of the plan when similar jobs have different evaluation and grade outcomes
- It is a time-consuming process
- The rank level definitions of the factors have too many shades of grey, making it difficult to clearly distinguish one level from another
- Absence of benchmarks to support and validate appropriate comparisons
- Staff have poor understanding of job evaluation plan and process and compensation
- Tendency in departments to emphasize the person rather than the position
- The system is unable to break the “grade culture” where employees and supervisors want a particular grade when initiating an evaluation

**12. Given the opportunity, what changes (short-term and long-term) do you think are needed to improve the effectiveness of the job evaluation plan and process?**

- Introduce generic or specific benchmarks for different grades in different occupational groups
- Collapse and simplify the rank level definitions, and eliminate the half grade definitions
- Combine education and experience factors on the Job Fact Sheet into a knowledge factor
- More education of the job evaluation plan and process including Comp 101 workshops, Lunch & learn sessions, and Q&A on HR website
- Install some kind of job evaluation status notification system

- Update the Job Fact Sheet template to make it more user-friendly.
13. What do you see are threats or risks to the institution with the use of the current JE system?
- Poor morale, which affects productivity and staff retention
  - Greater levels of frustration, cynicism, and plan manipulation
  - Negative reputation of institution that could adversely affect recruitment
  - Can generate more evaluation requests and appeals
  - Can reinforce the perception that the outcome of a job evaluation is dependent on what faculty or department the position belongs to
  - Can create more workplace conflicts, especially between managers/supervisors and the support staff.

## Survey questionnaire findings

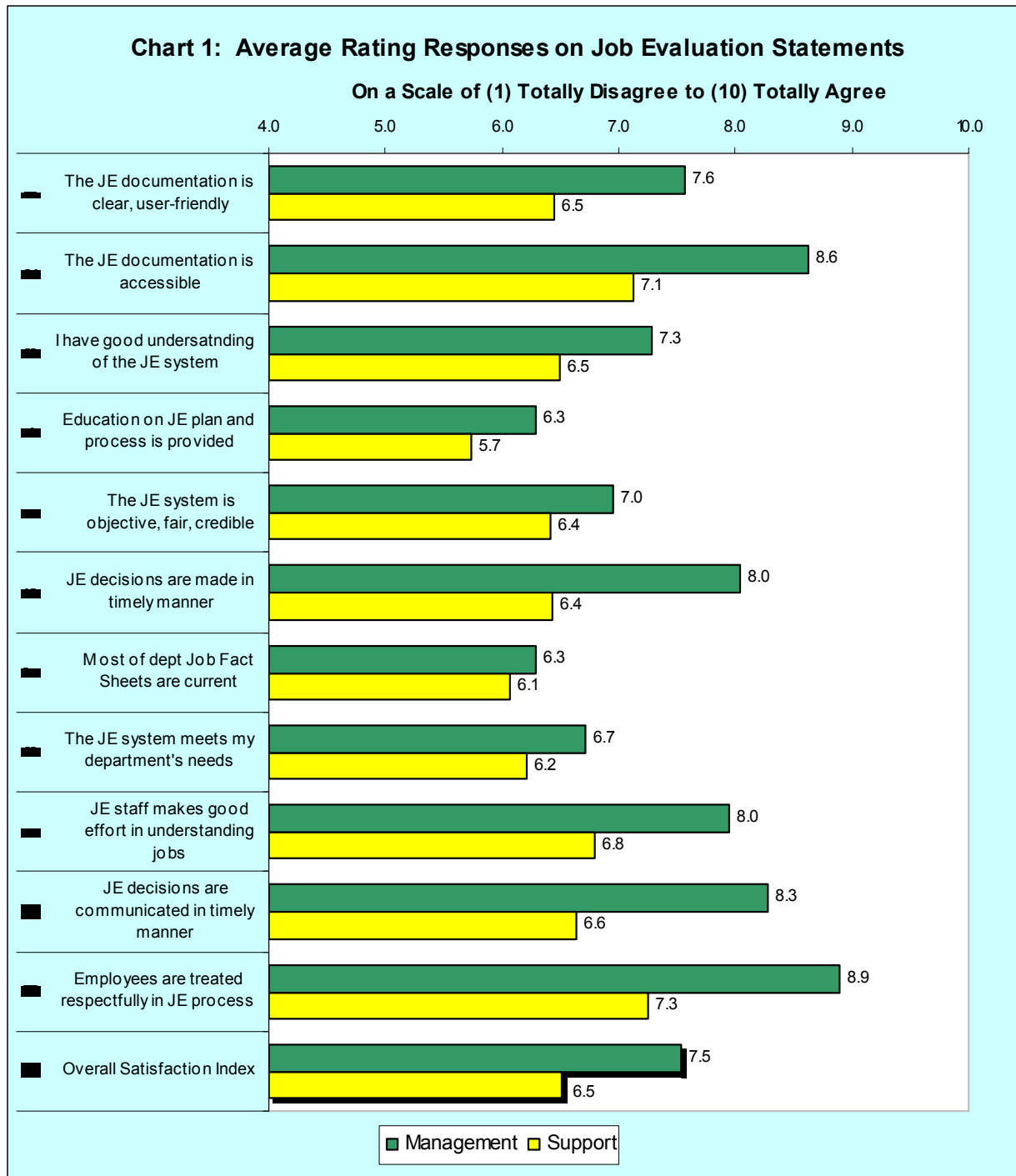
The following is the statistical and graphic presentation summary of the quantitative data derived from participants' anonymous responses to the survey questionnaires at the end of each focus group session.

Table 1 is a summary of the number of responses (n) and the average ratings for each of the eleven job evaluation statements. The data are segmented into three groups, namely management, support, and both groups combined under "all". The 12<sup>th</sup> item in the table is an "overall satisfaction index" which is the average of all eleven ratings by the three data groups.

Table 1: Average Rating Responses to U of A Support Staff Job Evaluation Statements Where "1" indicates Total Disagreement and "10" indicates Total Agreement						
Job Evaluation (JE) Issue Statements	Management		Support		All	
	n	Rating	n	Rating	n	Rating
1 The JE documentation is clear, user-friendly	21	7.6	33	6.5	54	6.9
2 The JE documentation is accessible	21	8.6	33	7.1	54	7.7
3 I have good understanding of the JE system	21	7.3	34	6.5	55	6.8
4 Education on JE plan and process is provided	21	6.3	34	5.7	55	5.9
5 The JE system is objective, fair, credible	20	7.0	34	6.4	54	6.6
6 JE decisions are made in timely manner	21	8.0	33	6.4	54	7.1
7 Most of dept Job Fact Sheets are current	21	6.3	32	6.1	53	6.2
8 The JE system meets my department's needs	21	6.7	33	6.2	54	6.4
9 JE staff makes good effort in understanding jobs	21	8.0	25	6.8	46	7.3
10 JE decisions are communicated in timely manner	21	8.3	30	6.6	51	7.3
11 Employees are treated respectfully in JE process	19	8.9	32	7.3	51	7.9
12 Overall Satisfaction Index		7.5		6.5		6.9

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The different average rating responses for the management and support groups shown in Table 1 are clearly depicted in Chart 1 for each of the eleven job evaluation statements as well as the overall satisfaction index.



## Major Themes Identified

We discern the following major themes from a review of the findings from the focus group perception audits and survey questionnaire.

1. **JE system works for the most part:** Based on the focus group discussions on the strengths and weaknesses, there is general indication that the Non-Academic Job Evaluation system provides an acceptable job evaluation tool and process that ensures internal equity and consistency across the institution for a variety of jobs, and that it works for the most part despite the usual level of complaints.
2. **Some “tweaking” needed:** There are, however, some shortfalls in the job evaluation plan and process that require updating and adjustment, such as the “tweaking” and simplification of the language used in the plan rather than a major overhaul or replacement with a new plan.
3. **More education needed:** There is apprehension and misunderstanding of what job evaluation is all about among some participants, who wrongly assume that job evaluation should deal with increased work volume, competitive market pay, employee performance evaluation, employee rewards, and career tracking. It was clear from the focus groups that education is needed to explain some compensation fundamentals including what job evaluation is and is not.
4. **Transparency versus understanding:** Unlike most, the University of Alberta is one of the very few organizations that take a leadership role in publishing and documenting its job evaluation plan and process on the University’s HR website that is open and available to everyone within and outside of the university. Transparency, however, does not necessarily translate to full or proper understanding. Despite the transparency of the plan and process, there is still a lack of awareness or understanding of the plan and process.
5. **The volume of work issue:** There were recurring criticisms in the focus groups that increased work volume has always been dismissed as a factor in job evaluation. Employees feel unfairly treated when taking on “*a greater volume of work*” as a result of reorganization, downsizing, and budget cuts. This may be similar to the “doing more with less” syndrome that many organizations experienced in the past two decades. There appears to be some confusion between two kinds of “*volume*”, namely “*doing more of the same thing*” versus “*doing more work with added complexity or variety.*” While most of the focus group participants agree and fully understand that work volume is still a workload issue that departments should manage, there is a tendency to confuse workload with the job evaluation process. This lack of understanding could be

# Appendix to RCJE Report

addressed through more education and drawing staff attention to the meaning of “significant changes” as defined by HR.

6. **Perceived job evaluation inequities:** There is a lack of understanding as to why jobs that are perceived by staff as similar jobs are at different grade levels.
7. **Job benchmarks needed:** There is a desire for some form of job benchmarks to provide useful reference points that would assist in better understanding of job evaluations to the different grade levels.
8. **JE turnaround time:** Any delays in the job evaluation process rest mainly in the departments where job fact sheets are written and signed off.
9. **Job Fact Sheets:** The writing of job fact sheets is a problem and struggle for many participants. It is seen as an onerous and time-consuming process.
10. **Overall satisfaction level:** The survey questionnaire responses show that the support group is slightly less satisfied with the job evaluation system than the management group, particularly around the understanding of the job evaluation plan and process and the overall satisfaction index.



## Recommendations

Based on the above findings and the major themes, we submit the following recommendations for your consideration.

### 1. Re-establish a job evaluation benchmark system

As a maintenance tool, the original 1989 job evaluation plan included a list of 47 benchmark jobs, selected from a variety of faculties and departments, intended to be used as job evaluation anchors or reference points for all other support staff job evaluations, in order to maintain overall internal equity and consistency in the application of the plan.

Over time, the 47 benchmark positions became irrelevant as job comparators. Some of the benchmark positions were too specific, narrow or specialized for meaningful cross-campus comparisons. Others became outdated in terms of duties, skills, factor ratings, evaluations, and classification levels. As a consequence, the historical benchmarks have fallen into disuse. The incumbents, departments and HR have therefore used different and, at times, conflicting sets of “comparators” to support evaluation requests, evaluation decisions, and appeals.

This is an opportunity to re-establish job evaluation benchmark positions that are considered solidly rated jobs for the key occupational groups at different grades. For some occupational groups, this may take the form of generic job descriptions that would also assist departments in writing job fact sheets for similar jobs without the pain of reinventing the wheel or writing a job description from square one. A set of solid benchmark positions will then form meaningful reference points against which evaluation requests would be compared on the factor ratings as well as on total job evaluation points.

### 2. General Communication of Plan and Process

We recommend more education and communication on the job evaluation plan and process. This would include ongoing education that can be utilized by job evaluation staff to promote a better understanding among management and support staff of the plan and process on items such as:

- a. What job evaluation is and is not,
- b. Compensation 101 on compensation fundamentals that clearly distinguishes between internal (job evaluation) and external equity (pay market) issues and processes,

- c. Q&A on job evaluation that can be posted on the website, and
- d. Informal lunch and learn sessions to de-mystify job evaluation.

Clarity and disclosure by any employer can only enhance the overall appreciation for and intent of human resource programs and policies. Based on our experience, there is a positive relationship between the degree of plan openness and the level of acceptability of plan results. We believe that greater communication (both documented and oral presentation) will enhance the plan and process, and will provide for a greater understanding and stability of plan results.

### 3. Simplify the rank level definitions of the factors

Based on the two factors used as examples in the focus groups, there is agreement that the current rank level “wafer-thin” definitions are confusing and difficult to work with. The current definitions are a legacy of the introduction of half-grades (0.5) in 1989 which departed from the original design of the Aiken Plan. We recommend that the number of levels within all factors be reviewed for simplicity and clarity, and perhaps reduced to four or five manageable levels.

However, in conjunction with the review of the rank level definitions, we also recommend a further assessment of what impact these changes will have on the overall job evaluation plan design, particularly with respect to the following features:

- a. Point Value Table that assigns points and weights to each of the factors;
- b. The Points Boundaries that determine Grade allocation of the position under review; and
- c. Any “broad-banding” outcome from the plan anatomy re-design that may have salary cost implications.

### 4. Combine education and experience factors into knowledge requirement in the Job Fact Sheet document

Given the feedback that education and experience requirements for positions can at times be subjectively established by employees and/or their managers without the proper context, there is an opportunity to establish consistent and *bona-fide* education and experience requirements that make sense from an institution-wide consistency perspective. The goal is to establish a more rigorous standard and protocol on this factor across campus, along with a better understanding of the application.

## 5. Conduct cyclical random classification audits

As part of the on-going maintenance program, we also recommend that Central HR undertake an evaluation of a random sample of positions on a cyclical annual or biennial basis to confirm if the current or previous ratings and evaluations of positions are still valid, perhaps in relation to the new set of benchmark positions. This is a pro-active measure that contributes to the overall healthy maintenance of the job evaluation plan and process. This is also a way of identifying outdated job fact sheets and making recommendations to departments to update the duties and responsibilities of positions.

## Appendix A

### Focus Group Interview protocol questions

#### Part 1: About the Plan

1. What do you think is the main purpose of a JE Plan?
2. Is the University's JE Plan well documented?
  - a. If not, explain
  - b. If yes, who has access to the JE documents?
3. Are you aware of the factors used to evaluate a support staff position?
  - a. If no, explain
  - b. If yes, what are some examples?
4. What are your views on the JE factors? Are they relevant or appropriate to the university?
5. Let's examine the rank definitions of a couple of factors. (Participants were asked to comment on the Rank Definitions in 5 a & b)
  - a. **Complexity-Judgment**: This factor deals with the complexity of the tasks performed, judgment/decision making necessary and problem solving required by the position.

Rank	Definitions
1.0	Highly repetitive
1.5	Repetitive
2.0	Routine
2.5	Standardized (occasional exceptions)
3.0	Standardized
3.5	Somewhat diversified and complex
4.0	Moderately diversified and complex
4.5	Generally diversified and complex
5.0	Diversified and complex

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- b. **Independence of Action**: This factor refers to the initiative required and also considers creativity and original thought required by the job. It is impacted by amount of direction and control received from supervisor, or standard practices and precedents.

Rank	Definitions
1.0	Works under close supervision
1.5	Works under frequent supervision
2.0	Works under less frequent supervision
2.5	Works under infrequent supervision
3.0	Works under occasional supervision
3.5	Works fairly independently
4.0	Works within general direction & guidance
4.5	Works with little direction
5.0	Works independently on general assignments

## Part 2: About the Process

- What are your thoughts on the timelines for the job evaluation process?
  - Within the department?
  - Once the request is received by Central Human Resources?
- What should be the turnaround time, once the request is received by Central Human Resources?
- Do you think that the Job Fact Sheets are monitored and changes acted upon in a timely manner?
- What is your understanding about the job evaluation appeal process?

## Part 3: SWOT Analysis

- In your opinion, what are the **strengths** of the current job evaluation system?
- In your opinion, what are the **weaknesses** of the current job evaluation system?
- Given the **opportunity**, what changes (short-term and long-term) do you think are needed to improve the effectiveness of the
  - The JE Plan?
  - The JE Process?
- What do you see are **threats or risks** to the institution with the use of the current JE system?

## Appendix B

### Survey questionnaire

#### QUESTIONNAIRE CHECKLIST ON NON-ACADEMIC JOB EVALUATION SYSTEM

Your participation in this questionnaire is important to the success of the perception audit of the Non-Academic Job Evaluation System. Your individual response will be kept **confidential** with the consultant. All individual responses will be aggregated to protect the anonymity of the respondents.

Please take a few minutes to read the issue statements below, and rate each statement on a scale of 1 through 10, where 1 indicates “total disagreement” (total failure), and 10 indicates “total agreement” (doesn’t get much better). Write the number (1 to 10) in the Ratings column\* against each job evaluation related issue statement. If unable to answer the question please indicate by stating “unknown” in the column.

Date:	Indicate if you are Support or Management staff ->	
<b>Non-Academic Job Evaluation System Issue Statements</b>		<b>Ratings*</b> <b>1 to 10</b>
<b>1. General</b>		
a. There is clear, user-friendly documentation of the Job Evaluation Plan and Process.		
b. I have easy access to the Job Evaluation documentation.		
c. I have a good understanding of the Job Evaluation System.		
d. Education on the job evaluation plan and process is provided.		
<b>2. Effectiveness of Plan and Process</b>		
a. The Job Evaluation System is objective, fair, and credible.		
b. The job evaluation decision process is carried out in a timely fashion.		
c. I believe that the majority of the Job Fact Sheets in my department are current and up to date.		
d. The current job evaluation system meets the needs of my department.		
e. Compensation consultants make a good effort in understanding the responsibilities of the positions under review.		
f. The job evaluation decisions are communicated in a timely manner to departments and employees		
g. I have been treated respectfully through the job evaluation process.		