

Merit Procedures Survey Report

Spring 2023

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March 2023

Executive Summary

In Winter 2023, MAUT surveyed McGill administrators with an aim to understand the University-wide procedures used for merit calculation, assessment, and assignment. The survey was sent to 98-University-wide unit Chairs and Deans, yielding a 54% response rate.

Overall, the results indicated varying merit allocation practices across Units with limited transparency of the process. Most of the Units use an in-house customized points-based scoring system to quantify performance in the main categories of academic duties (research, teaching, service), with the resulting merit scores and merit category typically decided by the Unit Chair/Dean/Director based on the score cutoff, budget, or performance benchmarks. Weighting of academic duties across research, teaching, and service varies across Units with diverse practices in the allocation of merit categories, with some Units assigning as many as possible faculty to the highest \$value Category 1 merit with others assigning the most faculty to the next highest \$value Category 2 merit. Merit category appeals and anomaly requests occur infrequently, with less than 5-10% of faculty within Units requesting merit reconsideration or salary anomaly on an annual basis. 75% of respondents believe the current merit system is fair and should not be replaced.

Survey Overview

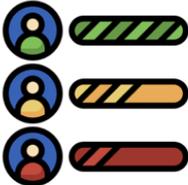
Figure 1. Survey Parameters

A. Survey Distribution



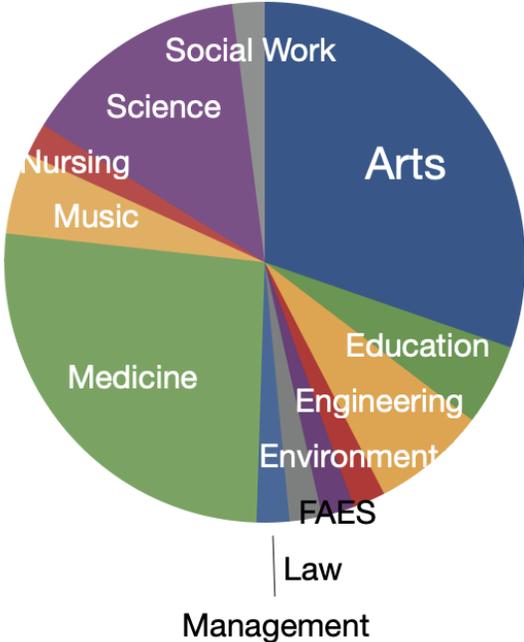
Qualtrics

Sent to 98 Chairs, Deans, Unit heads



54% response rate
92% completion

B. Unit Representation



The survey link was emailed to the HR-supplied list of 98-University-wide unit Chairs and Deans. 53 individuals started the survey, 49 completed it, for a 54% response rate and 92% completion rate. The respondents represented major Faculties well as illustrated in Figure 1B..

The survey contained 19 (mostly) multiple choice questions clustered into following categories: (1) Questions pertaining to merit score calculation; (2) Questions pertaining to Merit score assignment, merit category appeals, and anomaly requests; and (3) Comments.¹

¹ Survey questions can be viewed [here](#).

Survey Results

(1) Merit score calculation.

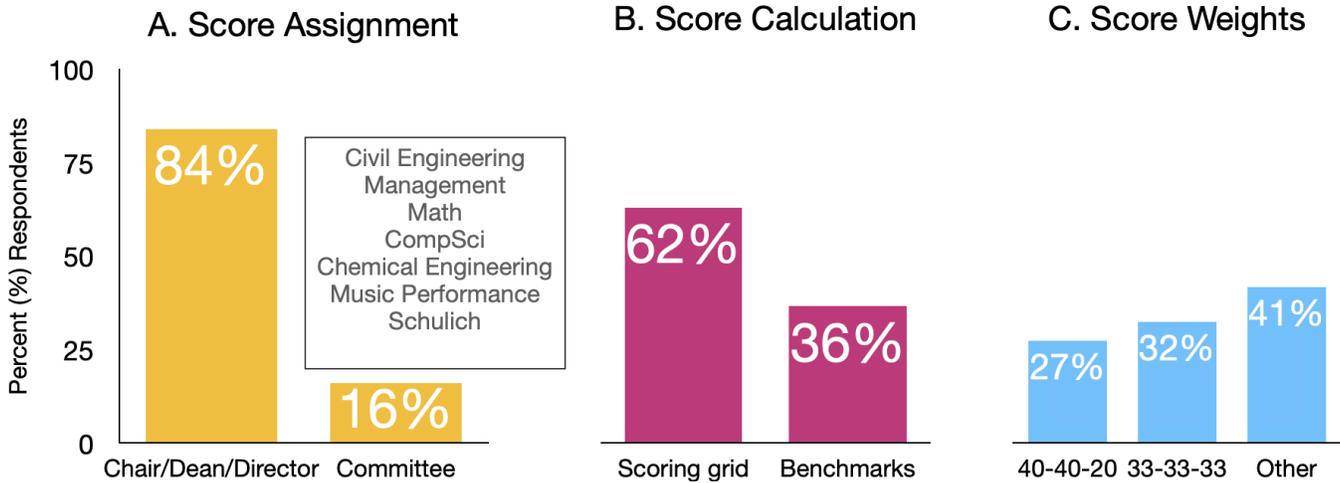
The initial merit score is calculated by the Chair/Dean/Director in 84% of Units, and by a merit committee in the remaining 16% of Units (Fig.2A). Committees are composed from ad-hoc faculty, assigned by the Dean, composed of volunteers, and rotate in some Units. No Unit reports the Department Tenure Committee (DTC) serving as the merit committee.

The merit score is calculated in two main ways. 62% of Units use a variant of a grid and score approach where contributions to research, teaching, and service are tabulated using a point-based system. The remaining about 36% of Units report using unspecified performance benchmarks (Fig. 2B). Point systems used range from 5, 6, 9, and 10-point scales, and qualitative ratings such as 'Superior/Below department average' and include various levels of contribution detail and point breakdowns (from crude numbers to decimals). Some Units report that initial merit score is done by self-assessment first.

27% of Units weight the merit score across research, teaching, and service components as 40-40-20%; 32% of Units as 33-33-33%, and 41% of Units report differential weighting across the three main duty categories (e.g., 50-30-20%; flexible allocation of 40-40 weights to the two strongest categories; and some even include collegiality/professionalism category weighting up to 12% (Fig2.C).

Procedures for merit allocation are largely nontransparent, with 87% of Units reporting only sending the standard instructions contained in the faculty annual report documents.

Figure 2: Merit Score Assignment, Calculation, and Weights



(2) Merit category assignment, appeals, and anomaly requests.

In 100% of Units, the Dean/Chair/Director transforms the initial merit score into the merit category.

The way in which merit categories are distributed varies greatly (Fig.3A). For example, 19% of Units assign most faculty to Categories 1 and 2, 15% of Units assign most faculty to Category 2, and 7% assign most faculty to Category 1. Many units (41%) base the merit category cutoffs on the merit score and/or budget constraints.

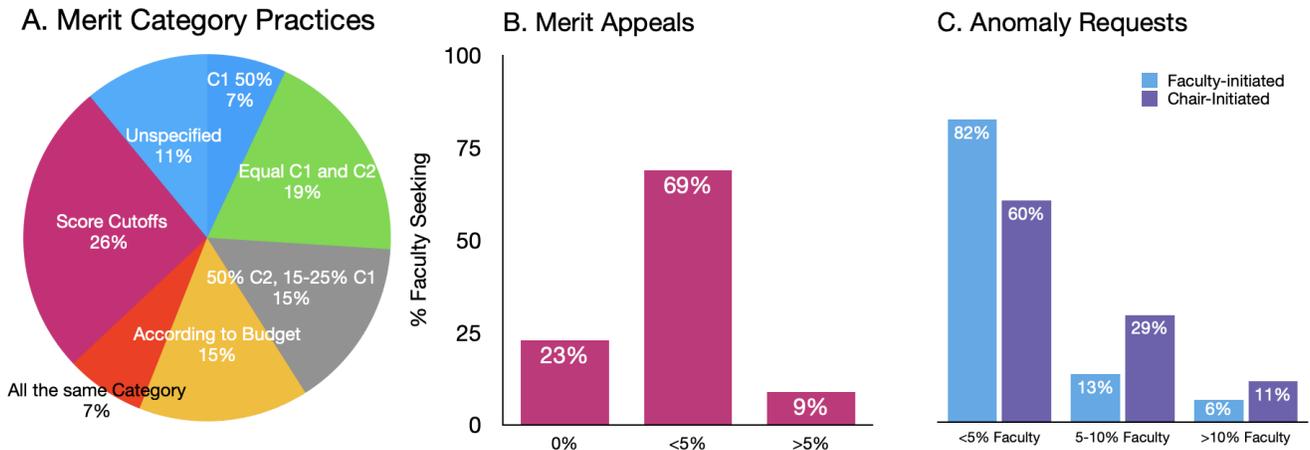
The performance feedback dialogue occurs in 16% of Units for all members and in 8% of Units for pre-tenure faculty while the rest offer an opportunity for a discussion (though a few take it up). 5% of Units report having no performance/feedback review with individual faculty.

On an average annual basis, merit category is appealed by less than 5% of faculty (in 92% of Units) and a salary anomaly is requested by less than 5% of faculty (in 82% of Units) and by the Chair for 5-10% of faculty (in 76% of Units).

Similar process applies for Cross-appointed faculty where the merit score and category allocation are jointly decided by the Unit heads.

85% of respondents report the merit procedures seen as mostly fair and equitable.

Figure 3: Merit category allocation, appeals, and anomaly requests



(3) Comments and best practices.

46% respondents indicated that they would like to see merit procedures changed (54% would not) but that the current system should not be replaced (75%). Suggested changes include increased process transparency, compressed dollar value between merit Categories 1 and 2, increase in ATB (across-the-board) salary component, increase in merit salary component, impact rather than output-based assessment, adoption of DORA principles in merit assessment, and removal of merit category allocation caps.

We also asked the respondents to share the best practices from their Units with us. Most praised the score-based benchmark documents they have developed. The other best practices included making the score-based algorithms and calculation public and transparent, ongoing and open discussions regarding merit, review and revision of the grid-and-score point benchmark documents by a committee, annual performance evaluation discussion with the Dean/Chair, rotating faculty membership in the merit committee, anonymous review of faculty and Chair’s performance.