

Supervisor's Guide to Position Descriptions

Introduction

This guide is designed to provide supervisory personnel, both staff and Faculty Department Chairs, with an understanding of how to complete Part II of the position description form and when to request that OHR review the classification of a position. In addition, we provide insight into uses of the position description, the role of employees and supervisors in completing Part I of the position description and resources for completing position descriptions. At the end of this document, we have provided a glossary of terms

What is a Position Description?

Position descriptions provide information on the functions (i.e., duties and responsibilities) and the requirements/qualifications one must possess if he/she is to be able to perform those functions.

The development of the position description follows several basic concepts that you need to keep in mind. The first concept is that management has the right to change the duties and responsibility of a position to meet the needs of the college. For example, Position A may be currently classified as a Financial Technician; however, the college needs a Business Systems Analyst to support the implementation of a new automated Financial Records program.

Another concept is that the position description reflects the needs of the organization and should be position focused. Often, employees view the creation of this document as a way to identify their importance to the organization. However, position descriptions should address how this position supports the mission and strategic goals of the organization. One way to look at this is to remove the incumbent from the position when you are writing the position description: If the position was vacant, would you be searching for a replacement who would perform the same functions as the current incumbent? If the answer is "Yes," then you are most likely focusing on the position. For example, if the incumbent of a Financial Technician position possesses the qualifications of a Business Systems Analyst, but the college has no need for another Business Systems Analyst position, then the position should not be reclassified to Business Systems Analyst.

Normally, the development of the position description is a collaborative process involving the supervisor and the employee. If the position is filled, the employee completes Part I of the position description and forwards his/her documentation to the supervisor. Then, the supervisor reviews and discusses what was written with the employee and both parties come to agreement on what is contained in the document. The supervisor should address areas of disagreement in the Comments section of Part II and he/she should not force the employee to rewrite Part I. (Note: If the position is new or vacant, then the supervisor completes both Part I and Part II of the position description.)

The employee and his/her immediate supervisor are the only two parties engaged in creating the position description but in some areas of the college, higher levels of management may wish to be involved in the process. When this occurs, managers and/or administrators may submit a memorandum documenting the areas of disagreement. The manager/administrator should not change what was submitted by the employee.

Key Concepts

- *A document that provides information on the **duties** and **responsibilities** of a job class.*
- *A document that indicates the **qualifications** of the job.*
- **THE FOCUS OF THE POSITION DESCRIPTION IS ALWAYS ON THE POSITION, NOT THE INCUMBENT**
 - *The duties and responsibilities of a position should differentiate one job class from another and should not be common for all job classes.*
 - *Possession of the qualifications in the position description must relate to the incumbent being able to perform the duties and responsibilities of the position.*

Why does the College Require Positions Descriptions for Every Position?

The position description is an essential tool in managing the recruitment, retention and motivation of staff and serves a variety of uses:

- To communicate and clarify job responsibilities, as well as the duties and requirements.
- To set performance goals or standards that will subsequently be used in reviewing the employee's performance.
- To support employee relations activities.
- To provide the basis for determining relative job value.
- To provide the foundation for determining compensation levels.
- To support career development and training activities.
- To support succession planning, recruitment and selection activities.
- To ensure compliance with federal and state regulations.

Completing Part I of the Position Description

Part I of the Position Description (PD) normally is completed by the employee – either individually or in a group with other employees with same title. This section of the PD focuses on the duties and responsibilities associated with the position not the person. It is the employee’s view of what they do, and no employee is expected to submit a PD that does not accurately reflect the job duties.

In Part I, the employee provides information on the duties and responsibilities of the position and indicates what its essential functions are; i.e., why the position exists.

- The essential job function describes what is critical for job success
- A limited number of employees are available who can perform the function
- The function may be highly specialized, requiring certain expertise or abilities to complete the job
- Once identified as essential, must make reasonable accommodations for disabled individuals
- This section addresses how the position differs from other positions at the college.

In addition, the employee describes his/her relationships with other positions at the college (who does the employee interact with and the nature of those interactions), the environment in which the position works, and the physical stresses of individuals performing the functions of the position. Lastly, Part I contains a Comments section for the employee to include information that may not have been covered in other sections.

Employees should sign Part I and submit the document to the immediate supervisor who will complete Part II. Supervisors should not modify what the employee has written in Part I, although the supervisor may help the employee to clarify statements in this section. The supervisor may address differences with what the employee wrote in the comments section of Part II (see below), but should not coerce the employee to change Part I.

Completing Part II of the Position Description

As the immediate supervisor of the position, you are to complete Part II of the PD. The information you provide on how the position functions is critical because you represent management and are in a position to understand the needs of the college better than the employee.

Part II asks for information on qualifications: the knowledge, skill and abilities (KSAs) required to effectively perform the essential functions of the position. One way of looking at the issue of qualifications is that they are a test regarding an individual's ability to successfully perform the job: if an individual "passes" the test, he/she can be successful in this position; if not, he/she will not be able to perform the essential functions of the job. The qualifications for the position are obtained through education and experience, and are used in

- Identifying and selecting individuals to fill the position
- Defining the career path within a job family
- Identifying training needs

As with the rest of the position description, the qualifications of the position should not focus on what the employee possesses but on the positions. For example, requiring that an Admissions Recruiter have a driver's license is not a job requirement, and it should not be included in this section of the position description. According to the Supreme Court case – **Griggs v Duke Power** – qualifications must be job related or a business necessity:

Where qualifications are deemed essential these should reflect the minimum basic educational requirements necessary to carry out the job to an acceptable standard.

What are KSAs?

Knowledge – Refers to understanding, a clear perception of facts

- Acquired information or concepts relating to a specific body of knowledge
- Theoretical understanding

Knowledge can be derived in a number of ways, for example education, training, or experience

Skill – The application of knowledge or demonstration of physical/mental expertise; an acquired measurable behavior

- The way(s) in which something is or ought to be done
- The ability to use one's knowledge effectively and readily in execution or performance
- Technical expertness/expertise

Skills are practical abilities gained through study or practice

Ability – Aptitude is the ability to attain knowledge or to develop a skill

- Refers to aptitude, talent or natural propensity such as interpersonal, athletic, logic & reasoning, linguistic, introspective, visual, mathematical abilities, etc. that cannot be obtained through training and/or experience.
- Also refers to those areas where an employee may have a general knowledge but specific knowledge may only be obtained through exposure on the job. Usually stated as “Ability to learn...”

The organization must be able to show that it can test for this ability and that this is not a discriminatory requirement

Knowledge and skills are acquired through education and/or experience. In completing this section, the supervisor describes the minimum acceptable qualifications and explains why this level is appropriate.

Education versus Experience

As previously stated, one may develop the KSAs to perform the job through wide variety of educational, and/or vocational and professional experiences. For some jobs, a particular qualification may be essential, while for others, no single qualification may be most appropriate. Experience may be of just as much importance as a formal qualification. Where qualifications are deemed essential these should reflect the minimum basic educational requirements necessary to carry out the job to an acceptable standard.

The type of experience and the length of required to have should be specified; however, stipulating length of experience required should be used cautiously because quality of experience is more important than length of experience. Note that experience can sometimes be transferable from one area of work to another, in which case skills may be more important than a narrow definition of experience.

Can Experience Be Substituted for Education?

In many situations, the answer to this question is yes. For example, Analyst/Programmer positions are not required to have a BS in Computer Science primarily because the KSAs can be acquired through experience. If you have accurately described the KSAs of the position, you should be able to determine if and how much experience is required to be equivalent to the amount of education you require.

Credentials

Credentials (such as degrees and licenses) are absolute necessities in some jobs and some positions require certifications, licenses or specialized courses because of legal requirements. For example, an individual practicing law must pass the bar. However, whatever credentials you establish have a direct bearing on the candidate’s ability to perform the essential functions of the position. For example, a Network Engineer is not required to have Novell Certification in order to perform the functions of his/her position. In the case of the latter position, having Novell Certification indicates that the employee has the KSAs to successfully perform the job, however, there are others who may have gained the same level of KSAs through work experience but did not have the time to study for and pass the Novell Certification examination.

Physical Requirements

Part II also requires that the supervisor confirm the physical requirements of the position and contains a section for his/her comments on what the employee stated in Part I. It is important for the supervisor to include only those physical requirements that are essential to the job. For example, many professional level position type documents related to their work. However, this is not an essential function of the position; therefore, we should not include statements related to the physical demands of typing in the position description. According to federal law, physical requirements must not discriminate against a class of individuals on the basis of race, color, religion, sex (i.e., gender), national origin, or disability.

Importance of Communication

The College believes that the supervisor should discuss his/her comments with the employee. Occasionally, we have found that the supervisor may not be aware that the employee performs some functions. Communicating perceptions about the position foster mutual understanding and creates a better working environment. In addition, this process assures that employees are recognized for what they are doing.

Glossary of Terms

Ability – Aptitude is the ability to attain knowledge or to develop a skill. Usually, an ability refers to an innate characteristic such as “Ability to lift 150 pounds unassisted.” In this case, if the candidate has some physical limitation, he/she may not possess this ability.

Class Specification – The official description of a class of positions which describes the nature of work, provides examples of work performed, and the generally accepted minimum qualifications required to perform the functions of the job class. The class specification is developed and maintained by the Office of Human Resources and there is one class specification for each job class.

Classification – The process of placing a position in the appropriate job class. Classification may result in a change in title and/or a change in grade allocation.

Duty – A group of tasks that form a major and distinct activity/function.

Education – Qualifications obtained through training, workshops, and conferences or through primary, secondary and post secondary programs.

Essential job function – A component of the position/job that is critical for job success.

Experience – Qualifications obtained through practice, application.

Job analysis – The systematic collection of job data; the process of breaking down a job into logical parts.

Job evaluation – The process of determining the relative value of a job or position based on internal and external considerations.

Job or Job Class – A unique position or several positions performing work of the same nature and value. The position is/positions are sufficiently similar in duties, training, experience and responsibilities, that the same title, the same qualifications, and the same schedule of compensation and benefits may be equitably applied to each position in the class.

Job Family or Occupational Group – A group of jobs performing similar work but at different levels of difficulty, complexity and impact.

Knowledge – Refers to understanding, a clear perception of facts. Usually, knowledge statements refer to “Knowledge of...,” “Understanding of...,” or “Familiarity of...” a concept, principle, practice, guideline, etc. Knowledge can be of a theoretical or practical nature.

KSA – Knowledge, Skills and Abilities.

Position – A collection of duties and responsibilities performed by one employee (i.e., a billet).

Position Description – A document prepared by the supervisor and/or the incumbent of the position that identifies the officially assigned duties and responsibilities, relationships, qualifications and other pertinent information relative to a position. There should be one position description for every staff position at the college (for example, if there are 22 Building Service Worker positions at the college, there should be 22 position descriptions).

Qualifications – the test regarding an individual’s ability to successfully perform the job. The qualifications for the position are obtained through education and experience and are written as minimum levels of knowledge, skills and abilities.

Responsibility – The element of the job that describes why the duty is performed.

Skill – The application of knowledge or demonstration of physical/mental expertise; an acquired measurable behavior. Skill is usually developed through experience/practice. For example, one may be able to identify the keys of a piano, but this does not mean that he/she has the skills to play a Mozart concerto.

Task – A component of the work consisting of a distinct activity that constitutes logical and necessary steps in the performance of work by an employee.