

# OPERATING PROCEDURES OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ASTRONOMY

## I. Preamble

The Astronomy Department is a department within the College of Natural Sciences of the University of Texas at Austin. It is closely affiliated with, but organizationally separate from, McDonald Observatory. These operating procedures are intended to be in conformity with the Rules and Regulations of the Board of Regents of the University of Texas at Austin, the Handbook of operating Procedure of the University of Texas at Austin, and the Policies of the College of Natural Sciences. Should any conflict arise, the rules, procedures, and policies listed above shall prevail in that order.

## II. Faculty, Research Staff, and the Graduate Studies Committee

The Voting Faculty of the Department shall be all persons officially appointed to the faculty as Professors, Associate Professors, Assistant Professors, and Lecturers, with at least 50% appointment, who are tenured or receiving probationary credit toward tenure. Faculty with less than 50% appointment, in addition to Assistant Research Professors, Associate Research Professors, Research Professors, and Emeritus, Retired, Visiting, and Adjunct Faculty, shall be accorded voice but not vote at Faculty meetings. All references to "Faculty" in this document are synonymous with "Voting Faculty".

The Budget Council consists of all members of the Voting Faculty with tenure. This is considered an "Extended Budget Council" form of governance and requires a vote every three years to affirm the desire of the Voting Faculty to continue it. The Senior Budget Council consists of all members of the Voting Faculty who are Full Professors. The Endowment Holders consists of all members of the Voting Faculty who hold endowed Chairs or Professorships.

The Research Staff designates Senior Research Scientists, Research Scientists, Research Associates, and Research Fellows, with at least 50% appointment. Research staff with less than 50% appointment, along with Retired Research Staff shall be accorded voice, but not vote at meetings of Research Scientists. Meetings that include agenda items of interest to both faculty and research staff shall include both.

The Graduate Studies Committee consists of all Voting Faculty and Research Staff Members who have an interest in co-supervising graduate student research. Portions of meetings that deal with issues restricted to faculty or to the Graduate Studies Committee shall be clearly indicated on the agenda. The Graduate Studies Committee has an Executive Committee, consisting of the Chair of Graduate Studies, a Graduate Advisor, and at least two other members, one of whom may be the Assistant Graduate Advisor. All are appointed by the Chair of the Department, and the Department Chair and Associate Chair are ex-officio members of the Graduate Studies Committee Executive Committee.

The Undergraduate Studies Committee consists of all Voting Faculty and Research Staff Members who have an interest in co-supervising undergraduate student research. Portions of meetings that deal with issues restricted to faculty or to the Undergraduate Studies Committee shall be clearly indicated on the agenda. The Undergraduate Studies Committee has an Executive Committee, consisting of the Chair of Undergraduate Studies, an Undergraduate Advisor, and at least two other members, one of whom may be the Assistant Undergraduate Advisor. All are appointed by the Chair of the Department, and the Department Chair and Associate Chair are ex-officio members of the Undergraduate Studies Committee Executive Committee.

A representative of the Post-doctoral Fellows elected by and from the Post-doctoral Fellows and a representative of the Graduate Students elected by and from the Graduate Students shall be given voice but not vote at meetings of the Faculty and the Graduate Studies Committee. They will, however, not be present when the progress of individual students is discussed.

### **III. The Chair and Associate Chair**

The Faculty shall recommend to the Dean a tenured member of the Faculty for appointment as Chair. Only Full Professors are eligible for this office. The term of office is four years. All candidates must agree in advance to serve if elected. A simple majority of the Voting Faculty is required for such election, which shall be administered by current Chair, unless the current Chair is a candidate, in which case the election shall be administered by the Chair of the Evaluations Committee, defined below. The election shall be conducted by secret ballot during the fall semester of the year in which a Chair is to be selected for recommendation to the Dean. If necessary, run-off election(s) will be conducted until the required majority approval is achieved. The ballot of a run-off election shall include only the names that received the two most votes in the first round. If a majority vote is not achieved, the results shall be transmitted to the Dean for further action. The duties of the new Chair begin one week before the first day of the academic year following the election. No person may be elected for more than two consecutive terms.

The new Chair appoints an Associate Chair and the members of all committees except the Evaluations Committee. The Associate Chair can substitute for the Chair at any meeting or function, can sign for the Chair when the Chair is unavailable, and can run faculty meetings if the Chair is unavailable.

### **IV. Committees**

#### **a. Evaluations Committee**

The Evaluations Committee shall consist of five members elected from and by the Voting Faculty. The term of office of each member shall be two academic years, to begin at the start of the Fall Semester. At the last regularly scheduled Faculty meeting of each academic year, the Faculty shall elect two (or three in alternate years) members by secret ballot. The member of the Committee whose term expires each year may not be reelected until two full years have elapsed. The Evaluations Committee will elect its own Chair.

The Evaluations Committee will provide advice and evaluations of faculty performance to the Department Chair, including, but not limited to, faculty annual evaluations, third-year reviews for untenured faculty, post-tenure review, recommendations for promotion, teaching relief, Chair's Fellows, awards, prizes, and priorities for office space. The Evaluations Committee advises the Chair and the Budget Council on merit raises for faculty. The criteria used for evaluation and the procedures that the committee follows are described in separate documents. Changes must be approved by the Budget Council and consistent with University and College policies. Merit raises are recommended to the Dean by the Chair, based on the procedures in force at the time. These procedures shall include input from the Evaluations Committee and the Budget Council.

The Evaluations Committee shall also consult with and advise the Chair and Budget Council on matters relating to promotion and tenure, as described in Section V.

#### **b. Other Committees**

Other committees may be appointed by the Chair and are advisory to the Chair and the Faculty. These committees may include members of the Research Staff, Post-doctoral Fellows, and Graduate Students. The standing committees of the Department include:

Computing Advisory Committee

- oversees the management of departmental computing facilities

Graduate Admission Committee

- recruits and recommends admission of graduate students

The Cox Committee

- recommends expenditures of the return on the Cox Endowment to the faculty and Department Chair.

The Teaching Peer Review and Awards Committee

- reviews teaching performance of all faculty periodically and recommends faculty members for teaching awards.

The Office Space Committee

advises the Chair on office space needs of the various groups in the department.

The Postdoc Advisory Committee

Advises Post-doctoral Fellows on career planning.

The Library Committee

Advises the Chair on issues involving the library and other information sources.

The Chair may appoint ad hoc committees as needs arise.

#### **V. Meetings of the Various Bodies Identified in Section II.**

- a. Meetings of the faculty and various budget councils may be called by the Chair whenever necessary. The Chair or a designee shall preside. Meetings of the Research Staff may be called by the Observatory Director. Meetings of the Graduate Studies Committee may be called by the Chair of the Graduate Studies Committee. Meetings of the Undergraduate Studies Committee may be called by the Chair of the Undergraduate Studies Committee. When possible, these meetings should be coordinated to prevent excessive numbers of meetings.
- b. A meeting of the Faculty shall be called by the Chair at the request of at least one third of the Voting Faculty. The Chair or a designee shall preside.
- c. At least two meetings of the Faculty shall be held during each semester. If possible, the meetings shall be at a regular, monthly date and time.
- d. Robert's Rules of Order Revised shall be followed if formal proceedings are requested by at least one third of the Voting Faculty present at the meeting. Otherwise discussions shall be informal.
- e. The Chair shall provide a staff person to record minutes of the meetings. Minutes shall be distributed electronically promptly after the meeting.
- f. A quorum for the transaction of business at a meeting shall be a majority of the members of that group. Members who cannot be present may leave a written proxy with the Chair of that group or with another member of the group. The proxy must specify whether it is specific (e.g., a yes or no vote on a specific item) or general (the proxy holder can vote the proxy as he or she thinks the absent person would want).
- g. The Agenda for a meeting shall be prepared by the Chair of the group and shall be distributed to the members at least 24 hours prior to the meeting. Only items on the Agenda may be acted upon at the meeting. However, an action item may be placed on the agenda at the meeting by a two-thirds vote of the members present. Discussion items may be added to the Agenda by the members following action items, at the discretion of the Presiding Officer.
- h. Soon after the beginning of each Fall Semester, the Agenda for a Faculty Meeting shall include an item calling for a vote by secret ballot on whether a formal evaluation of the Chair should be requested. If three-fifths of the Faculty vote for reviewing the Chair's

performance, the Associate Chair shall request that the Dean initiate an evaluation of the Chair.

#### **VI. Recommendation of New Appointments, Promotion and Tenure**

The Chair and the relevant Budget Council shall recommend to the Dean individuals for new appointment, promotion and tenure in the department. A vote by the relevant Budget Council shall be solicited by the Chair on such recommendations. All members of the Faculty may vote on new appointments. However, a member of the Faculty shall not vote on promotion or tenure to a rank higher than the rank of said member. The Budget Council votes on promotion to tenure, the Senior Budget Council votes on promotion to Full Professor, and the Endowment Holders vote on promotion to endowed positions. The votes of the relevant Budget Council shall be reported to the Dean by the Chair, along with the Chair's recommendation.

- a. **New Appointment:** The Chair shall appoint the members and the chair and members of a Search Committee, which carries out the necessary tasks to arrive at a short list of candidates. The Chair shall make the final recommendation to the Dean, following the votes of the Voting Faculty.
- b. **Promotion and Tenure:** The Evaluations Committee shall review annually during the Spring Semester the records of all faculty members who may be eligible for promotion or tenure, and determine if a review by the full, relevant Budget Council is warranted. Supplementary material from the eligible faculty member and input from the Faculty may be solicited by the Chair for this annual review. A member of the Committee may participate in deliberations concerning promotion(s) or tenure to a rank higher than the rank of said member, but he or she may not vote on the question. If a full review is deemed not warranted, the Chair shall convey the decision, as well as guidance and feedback, to the faculty member in a timely fashion. If warranted, the Chair shall initiate the formal review process before or immediately after the end of the Spring Semester, in accordance with the current policies and procedures of the University and College. Input to the formal review shall be solicited by the Chair from the Faculty with rank higher than the rank of the faculty member being reviewed.
- c. **Notification of Nonreappointment:** In the case of a negative tenure decision for a tenure-track faculty member, any notification of nonreappointment shall follow the procedures of the University and College.

#### **VII. Right of Petition and Appeal**

Any member of the Department may request a hearing by the Chair or by any Committee and, on presenting such a request, shall receive a hearing.

#### **VIII. Revision of the Operating Procedures**

- a. Upon receipt of a petition by a majority of the Voting Faculty accompanied by a proposal for revision of the operating procedures, the Chair shall circulate said proposal among the Faculty and shall schedule a meeting of the Faculty to consider said proposal. Unless the Voting Faculty agrees unanimously to an earlier meeting, at least ten-calendar days notice shall be given of such a meeting, but the meeting shall not be delayed more than twenty calendar days from receipt of the petition.
- b. A favorable vote by a simple majority of the Voting Faculty present at the meeting shall be required to amend the operating procedures. A quorum at the meeting convened for the purpose of amending the operating procedures shall consist of two-thirds of the Voting Faculty.
- c. The Chair shall review the operating procedures not less than once every five years, and shall petition the Faculty, in accordance with Section VIII.a of the operating procedures,

for such amendments as are deemed necessary for the conduct of departmental affairs and for conformity with the governing rules and procedures identified in Section I.

March 2010

March 2011 Revision 1: added categories of Research Professors to non-voting faculty