

NDSU Guidelines for Developing Position Descriptions

Position descriptions include two major components: 1) a description of the essential and secondary functions (duties/responsibilities) and 2) a description of the qualifications (knowledge, skills, and abilities) needed to perform those duties. Specific identification of both the functions associated with the position and the relevant qualifications is crucial for several reasons.

The position description provides the basis for evaluation of applicants when a vacant position is being filled as well as for the subsequent responsibility review or periodic review of the person hired. In addition, descriptions of duties and qualifications are the basis for the development of interview questions since those questions must be job-related. A clear and well-written position description also assists potential applicants in deciding if they want to apply for a particular position.

Determining the essential and secondary functions of each position is a critical part of compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. The following are points for consideration in identifying the essential elements of a position:

- does the position exist to perform the function?
- is the function a highly specialized one requiring special education, training or licensure?
- is there a limited number of employees among whom the function can be distributed?

If the answers to any of these questions is "yes," then the function is likely to be essential.

Additional points for consideration in determining essential functions include: the employer's judgment, position descriptions written *before* advertising a position, the amount of time spent performing the function, the consequences of not performing the function, the work experience of past and present incumbents of the position. The essential functions of a position may need to be determined on a case-by-case basis rather than solely through the review of a basic position description. Any function that is not identified as essential becomes secondary.

1. FUNCTIONS (Duties/Responsibilities)

A. Banded Positions

For **banded** positions, a broad job series description is contained in the North Dakota University System Job Specifications available in the Office of Human Resources. The specific duties and qualifications of a particular position are developed by the employing department. **If a departmental description already exists, it should be reviewed each time a vacancy occurs** to assure that it continues to reflect the essential functions and related qualifications of the position.

Banded positions fall into six major categories: *executive/managerial, professional, technical, clerical, trades & crafts, and service*. The duties and responsibilities of these positions vary greatly and are determined by the nature of the particular position.

Functions (duties and responsibilities in banded positions generally considered *professional*, however, usually fall into areas such as business/administration, communication/information technology, research/science and student services.

Functions such as those suggested below should be identified in each area:

1. *Business/Administration*

- plans/analyzes/develops/implements operating procedures and policies in an agency, department, or institution
- performs administrative functions such as fiscal, personnel, and office management
- analyzes existing operations and programs and develops recommendations for their improvement
- develops plans and policies for organizational effectiveness and efficiency; ensures proper implementation
- performs liaison work with organizations; confers with officials in the development, interpretation, and installation of programs and procedures
- plans, coordinates, and supervises the work of assigned personnel

2. Communication/Information Technology

- identifies, researches and selects technologies or systems that support strategic direction;
- develops, manages and provides customer support of technologies or systems;
- develops, integrates and supports human component into systems in a rapidly changing technical environment;
- plans, designs and develops networked systems or plan, design, implement a request for proposal procedure to support a bidding process based on detailed bid specifications;
- gathers and analyzes information to determine system needs and requirements;
- determines feasibility of expanding or adding to existing resources;
- identifies, defines and evaluates alternatives which meet standard needs;

3. Research/Science

- assists in planning, organizing, and conducting scientific research
- evaluates and utilizes appropriate methodology and tools to carry out research projects
- analyzes information using computer programs
- develops new and improved methods of performing research
- writes research results and assists in the writing of research publications
- supervises and trains subordinates.

4. Student Services

- provides direct assistance to students and staff in carrying out student affairs responsibilities
- provides advice and counsel to students and/or student organizations in areas concerning the general welfare of students
- participates in the establishment of programs and activities for students
- serves on student and university committees
- assists with instructional responsibilities
- plans, coordinates, evaluates, and directs student affairs programs and services.

B. Nonbanded Academic Positions

For **academic** positions, functions generally fall into one or more of three major areas: instruction, research/scholarly and creative activities, or service. Functions such as those suggested below in each of the three major areas of academic responsibility should be identified:

1. Instruction

- level of courses to be taught: undergraduate, graduate, large sections of lower division courses, etc.
- responsibility for developing new courses or updating current offerings

- desired academic specialty within the departmental discipline, if any
- supervision of graduate teaching assistants

2. Research and Other Scholarly/Creative Activities

- desirable research specialties
- responsibility for developing grant proposals and securing outside funding for research
- expected scholarly or creative activity
- supervision of graduate research assistants

3. Professional Service

- service on department/college/university-wide committees
- advising students on academic matters
- involvement in continuing education activities, either credit or noncredit
- contributions to professional/community organizations

C. Nonbanded Administrative Positions

Clarification of duties for nonbanded administrative positions is also important. While the areas of responsibility may be broadly conceived, careful specification of these areas is important in order to identify appropriate qualifications. The person who has the major responsibility for evaluating the performance of the individual in a particular position should have primary responsibility for the development of the position description. Input from others in the unit or from the search and screening committee is often helpful and certainly appropriate as long as the supervisor has the final approval.

2. QUALIFICATIONS

All qualifications must be related to the functions of the position and should go beyond general education and experience to identify specifically the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to perform the duties. Attributes such as effective communication skills (oral and/or written); effective interpersonal skills; eligibility for particular types of certification or licensure; physical requirements; experience in, or knowledge of, specific settings such as college or university; experience with certain machines or equipment; demonstrated skills in research, teaching, or other areas; a previous publication record; or previous funding of grant proposals are examples of areas to consider in identifying the qualifications.

Qualifications are generally divided into two (2) categories; those which are **minimum** (required) and those which are **preferred** (desirable).

Minimum qualifications are those which are considered essential to perform the job; no one lacking any of the minimum qualifications should be considered.

Preferred qualifications range in their desirability. Some may be strongly preferred; others would perhaps be good additional strengths, but ones which few applicants would be likely to have.

The qualifications (minimum and preferred) should include **all** criteria on which the applicants will be judged. Those who are involved in screening applications should identify clearly the bases for evaluating qualifications which require subjective assessments. For example, effective written communication skills may be evaluated on the basis of the application letter and/or the applicant's resume. Interpersonal skills may be assessed through reference checks and during the interview.

Developed by staff members in the Equity, Diversity and Global Outreach Office and the Office of Human Resources/Payroll