



# PRiSM

## Performance Reviews in the School of Medicine

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# PRiSM

## Performance Reviews in the School of Medicine

### Background

PRiSM (*Performance Reviews in the School of Medicine*) is a modern web application used by CUSOM faculty members to prepare and route their annual performance evaluations for review. PRiSM launched in 2014, merging three faculty evaluation systems (DOMINO, FIDO and Family Medicine DOMINO) into one unified evaluation platform. PRiSM facilitates data collection, storage and retrieval and ensures that faculty performance reviews are comprehensive and standardized across the school. PRiSM allows faculty members to document their major teaching, research, clinical, and community outreach and service accomplishments. Most teaching evaluations are automatically uploaded into PRiSM, and there are also sections to capture publications, grants, patents, and honors and awards.

Currently, full-time ( $\geq 0.50$  FTE) School of Medicine faculty members who are employed by the University of Colorado or Denver Health are required to complete their annual review using PRiSM. The deadline for completing annual performance reviews is March 1<sup>st</sup> following the calendar year of the review.

### Why Performance Reviews?

Almost all U.S. medical schools require that faculty members undergo regular performance evaluations. While there are no uniform standards for conducting these reviews, and practices vary widely, there is general agreement about their purposes. If carefully designed and consistently implemented, performance reviews are essential tools for ensuring that faculty members are fulfilling their assigned responsibilities and meeting personal, departmental, program and institutional goals. In Colorado, state law also requires that all state employees, including faculty members employed by the University, undergo an annual performance review and receive an overall “performance rating.”

We have long believed that performance reviews should have a broader purpose than simply assigning a “rating.” Specifically, well-designed performance review systems should:

- Help faculty members identify their strengths, as well as their shortcomings.
- Facilitate a bi-directional conversation between the faculty member and their chair or other reviewer, providing an opportunity for the faculty member to affirm their

academic and professional goals and communicate resource needs (for example, administrative support, mentoring, coaching, space, time, wellness resources or additional training).

- Encourage faculty members and reviewers to discuss broader departmental and institutional goals, including steps the faculty member or the department has taken, or has not yet taken, toward building a culture of professionalism, respect, equity and inclusiveness.

*A performance review, done well, applauds excellent work, delivers beneficial feedback, and inspires a feeling of forward momentum.*

Wood J. *New York Times*. January 3, 2021

### The Features of PRiSM

- The PRiSM platform includes the following features: single sign-on capability; customized fields permitting faculty members to highlight their accomplishments in all relevant areas, including teaching and mentoring, research, scholarship, patient care and institutional and community service; separate fields to summarize program leadership activities; customizable review and approval routing, based on the faculty member's department, hospital, employer, clinical practice site or other locus within the institution; automatic uploading of medical student and some resident teaching evaluations; automatic uploading of PubMed publications; documentation of assigned mentors and an optional field to record the mentor's input; record of grant funding; and honors, awards and other recognition.
- PRiSM includes storage of prior years' performance reviews and supporting documents, and faculty members can automatically import and update information from the prior year.
- PRiSM includes real-time dashboards, so that departmental administrators can track the progress and ensure timely completion of all reviews.
- PRiSM includes direct links to enable faculty members to edit and update their CU Medicine profile.
- Separate versions of PRiSM have been created to enable the Dean to conduct annual evaluations of the department chairs and other school leaders.
- PRiSM also includes required "attestation check boxes," whereby faculty members affirm their understanding of, and compliance with, various School of Medicine policies pertaining to professionalism, respect for learners, management of gift accounts and conflicts-of-interest. Links to key documents are provided.

Importantly, PRiSM is designed to facilitate, but not replace, annual conversations between the faculty member and their supervisor. As noted above, faculty members are encouraged to highlight current challenges and resource needs, including needs for

mentoring, space, administrative support or specialized training. PRiSM provides fields so that the chair and other supervisors can provide feedback, assess the faculty member's progress toward promotion and assign an overall performance rating (as required under Colorado law). PRiSM also includes questions about community collaborations, community-based participatory research, advocacy, and pipeline, recruitment and mentoring activities.

For the past seven years, PRiSM has been implemented successfully with almost 100 percent compliance. PRiSM has also helped the School of Medicine meet two important goals: First, ensuring efficiency, consistency and accountability in annual faculty performance reviews; and, second, helping to establish an appreciative culture that promotes faculty and institutional excellence, through performance reviews, goal setting and constructive feedback. In accomplishing these goals, PRiSM has also saved time for faculty members and their chairs and has helped the institution meet regulatory requirements, including providing data for individual departmental reviews and LCME accreditation.

### Recent Enhancements to PRiSM

- In 2019, a new field was added to capture feedback regarding a faculty member's performance (successes and ongoing challenges) as a clinical, research or training program director, when working outside the primary department.
- In 2021 new questions were added to help align faculty performance reviews with core missions of the School of Medicine. For example, new fields inquire about, and thereby encourage, faculty members' efforts and accomplishments in support of a culture of professionalism, diversity, equity and inclusivity. See the Appendix for a Guide to using the new DEI section.

This PRiSM guide is also new. The Guide includes tips to help chairs and other reviewers ask faculty members about their needs in other areas, such as wellness, resilience, whether they feel their career is "on track," whether they feel valued and supported in the department, and whether their work currently has meaning and purpose.

This guide also includes reminders for faculty members who are being reviewed about negotiating for needed resources (for example, mentoring, space, training and administrative support) and about accepting criticism as well as praise, acknowledging shortcomings and moving forward with a "growth mindset."

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## Performance Reviews in the School of Medicine

### Guidelines for Chairs and Other Reviewers<sup>1</sup>

As highlighted above, *A performance review, done well, applauds excellent work, delivers beneficial feedback and inspires a feeling of forward momentum.* Therefore, it is important to have a frank conversation not only about a faculty member's performance, but also about their professional progress and opportunities for growth. Beyond assigning the required performance rating, a well-done review can help faculty members move forward and up. Here are some suggested strategies for department chairs, division and section heads and other reviewers:

- In addition to reviewing the faculty member's performance during the prior year, be sure to review their professional plans for the next 1-3 years. Faculty members' professional plans should contain concrete goals, timelines and measurable outcomes ("deliverables").
- Review the faculty member's activities and accomplishments in each area (teaching, clinical service, scholarship, service, diversity, equity and inclusion and professionalism). Although there will only be a single, overall performance rating, try to provide specific comments in each relevant area.
- *There shouldn't be any surprises.* Ideally, if a faculty member has struggled or performed poorly in one or more areas, there have already been meetings and discussions, where shortcomings have been addressed and expectations clarified. Wherever possible, *provide timely and actionable feedback.*
- Apart from reviewing the faculty member's performance, be sure to encourage a broader discussion. Consider asking about their resource needs, and whether their expectations of the department are being met.
- As a way to inquire (indirectly) about the individual's sense of wellness, ask about the things that are known to drive satisfaction and well-being. For example, consider these or similar questions: <sup>2</sup>
  - *What is the most meaningful part of your job?*
  - *Do you feel you have the autonomy to do things that are meaningful and give you a sense of purpose?*
  - *Is there anything I can do to support you so you are able to spend more time on things that are meaningful or give you a sense of purpose?*

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<sup>1</sup> Some of these "best practices" are taken from the recent *New York Times* article by Julie Wood (Some Ways to Manage Performance Evaluations). January 3, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Thank you to Drs. Jenny Reese, Neill Epperson and Elizabeth Harry for these suggestions.

- Focusing on “systems” challenges, *what is one pebble in your shoe that, if removed, would make the largest impact on your professional fulfillment?*
- With the pandemic and other world events, lead with empathy, and acknowledge, even if you don’t inquire about details, that many faculty members have faced unprecedented personal and professional challenges --- working from home, childcare, caring for older relatives, isolation, microaggressions or other stresses. In doing this, be sure to respect their privacy and only discuss what the faculty member wishes to share.
- Even if some previously established goals have not been met, be sure to acknowledge the faculty member’s other strengths and accomplishments, such as flexibility, teamwork, a positive attitude, a growth mindset, initiative, and willingness to help others. In other words, acknowledge and document the different ways they add value to the department.
- In the spirit of a just culture, be aware of power and privilege dynamics that may exist between you and your faculty member, and also with respect to those who may be giving you feedback about the faculty member. Power dynamics may arise from differences in our formal positions, or they may stem from a person's many identities (for example, race, gender, gender identity, disability, culture or language). One actionable step you can take during performance review season would be to renew or intensify your own unconscious bias training.
- Stay optimistic, and encourage the faculty member to be optimistic, too. Talk about what success for the faculty member will look like. This is a perfect time to tell them, *We got this, together.*<sup>1</sup>


## **Assigning Performance Ratings**

At the conclusion of the annual review, faculty members must receive an overall performance rating (Outstanding, Exceeding Expectations, Meeting Expectations, Below Expectations or Not Meeting Expectations). Only the final reviewer (the department chair or their official designee) may assign this final rating. However, PRiSM includes a menu that allows primary and secondary reviewers to recommend (but not assign) a performance rating.

The summary rating is the only information that is sent to Human Resources; the performance rating becomes a publically-available record. The remainder of the information in the PRiSM review remains in the faculty member’s confidential personnel file. PRiSM review information is not shared with promotion or tenure review committees and does not influence promotion and tenure decisions. However, campus policies require that annual performance reviews be made available to post-tenure review committees for tenured faculty members.

## Performance Improvement Agreements and Extensive Reviews

Faculty members who are rated “Below Expectations” or “Not Meeting Expectations” on their annual review must participate in developing and implementing a Performance Improvement Agreement (PIA). The PIA should be put into place within two months after the end of the review cycle. However if the faculty member chooses to appeal their “not meeting expectations” or “below” expectations” rating, the PIA process does not begin until the appeal process is completed. If the faculty member does not meet the goals of the PIA by the next review cycle, an Extensive Review process is initiated. For more information about PIAs (including a template), Extensive Reviews, and the process for faculty members to appeal their annual review, please see the [SOM appeal policy](#). For additional information about the procedures, go to: <https://www.cu.edu/ope/aps/5008>.



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## Performance Reviews in the School of Medicine

### Guidelines for Faculty Members

As outlined in earlier sections of this Guide, PRiSM is the platform used by CUSOM faculty members to prepare and route their annual performance evaluations for review. PRiSM allows faculty members to update their teaching, research, clinical, and community outreach accomplishments. There are also sections to capture publications, grants, patents, and honors and awards. Most teaching evaluations are uploaded automatically and are stored in PRiSM.

All full-time ( $\geq 0.5$  FTE) School of Medicine faculty members employed by the University of Colorado or Denver Health are required to complete an annual review using PRiSM. At the conclusion of the annual review, University-employed faculty members receive an overall performance rating (Outstanding, Exceeding Expectations, Meeting Expectations, Below Expectations or Not Meeting Expectations), as described below.

The deadline for completing annual performance reviews is March 1<sup>st</sup> following the calendar year of the review.

Performance reviews should be more than a “grading exercise.” They have a broader purpose than simply assigning (and receiving) a “rating.” Indeed, as highlighted in earlier sections, performance reviews can accomplish much more than ensuring that faculty members are fulfilling their assigned responsibilities. Well-done performance reviews can also help all of us:

- Identify our strengths, as well as our shortcomings;
- Affirm (or modify) our academic and professional goals;
- Communicate the resources we need (for example, administrative support, mentoring, coaching, space, time, wellness resources or additional training);
- Determine whether our work has meaning and purpose, and whether our career feels like it is “on track;” and
- Move forward in our careers, with renewed momentum and optimism.

Here are some strategies to help you get the most out of your performance review:

- Throughout the year (not only at the time of annual review), update your “mission statement” and professional goals and document your accomplishments.
- When you prepare your PRiSM review, be sure to include your professional plan for the next 1-3 years. Faculty professional plans should contain concrete goals, timelines and measurable outcomes (“deliverables”). Examples: Submit grant to NIH by September 30<sup>th</sup>; complete interprofessional pathway for stroke management by the end of the year; submit manuscript on resident resilience and wellness by June 1<sup>st</sup>; prepare 3 new bench-to-bedside lectures for residents and fellows for the



Spring semester; develop 3 new grant-writing workshop and implement by July 30<sup>th</sup>; revise healthcare humanities curriculum and submit to MedEdPORTAL by June 30<sup>th</sup>.

- Think about (and describe in PRiSM) the ways in which you add value to your department, to the clinical or research institutions where you work, and to the learning environment. When it comes to the ways you may be adding value, think beyond your formal job description; “adding value” can include the different ways you promote the missions of your department and the institution, your community outreach and collaborations, and the support or mentorship you provide regularly to learners, co-workers and peers.
- During the reviews, be explicit about the support or resources that you need in order to achieve success (for example, administrative support, mentoring, coaching, space, time, wellness resources or additional training).
- As you think about what you hope to gain from the review, also consider ways that you can perform at an even higher level and augment your impact.
- Professional growth does not happen just during the annual performance review. Therefore, don’t assume that the review and attendant conversation must be limited to a once-a-year meeting. Instead, meet with your chair or designated reviewer regularly, and talk about your accomplishments, challenges and goals. Frequent check-ins allow you to course-correct and avoid surprises, and also to consider new ideas for career growth and success. The annual check-in is critical, but it is also important to ask for, and receive, more frequent feedback.
- We are all likely to receive some feedback that is disappointing; indeed, annual reviews are about accepting criticism as well as praise, acknowledging our shortcomings and moving forward with a “growth mindset.” If you receive feedback that is disappointing, ask for a clear description of what was expected of you, and how you fell short of meeting those expectations. Commit to doing better every year.
- Whether the review is reassuring or disappointing, be sure to point out, without hesitation, any areas where the information considered in the review (including the overall rating) appears to be incomplete, unfair, biased or arbitrary. Faculty members who feel their review is unfair can [appeal their assigned rating](#).

## Your Performance Rating


At the conclusion of the annual review, faculty members receive an overall performance rating (Outstanding, Exceeding Expectations, Meeting Expectations, Below Expectations or Not Meeting Expectations). Only the final reviewer (the department chair or their official designee) may assign this final rating. However, PRiSM includes a menu that allows primary and secondary reviewers to recommend (but not assign) a performance rating.

The summary rating is the only information that is sent to Human Resources; the performance rating becomes a publically-available record. The remainder of the information in the PRiSM review remains in the faculty member’s confidential personnel

file. PRiSM review information is not shared with promotion or tenure review committees and does not influence promotion and tenure decisions. However, campus policies require that annual performance reviews be made available to post-tenure review committees for tenured faculty members.

## **Performance Improvement Agreements and Extensive Reviews**

Faculty members who are rated “Below Expectations” or “Not Meeting Expectations” on their annual review must participate in developing and implementing a Performance Improvement Agreement (PIA). The PIA should be put into place within two months after the end of the review cycle. However if the faculty member chooses to appeal their “not meeting expectations” or “below” expectations” rating, the PIA process does not begin until the appeal process is completed. If the faculty member does not meet the goals of the PIA by the next review cycle, an Extensive Review process is initiated. For more information about PIAs (including a template), Extensive Reviews, and the process for faculty to appeal their annual review, please see the [SOM appeal policy](#). For additional information about the procedures, go to: <https://www.cu.edu/ope/aps/5008>.



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### Guidelines for Department Administrators

- The deadline for completing annual performance reviews is March 1<sup>st</sup> following the calendar year of the review.
- An email is sent to all faculty members and department administrators in the Fall, outlining any new enhancements that were made to the PRiSM platform since the last review period.
- It is the department's responsibility to ensure that faculty members complete their annual reviews in a timely manner, allowing time for discussions between the reviewer(s) and the faculty member and finalization of the performance reviews and performance ratings.
- It is also the department's responsibility to assist faculty members in developing and implementing any required Performance Improvement Agreements (PIAs) or Extensive Reviews (See below for more information).
- The PRiSM platform includes an administrative dashboard, which allows department administrators to track the progress of all performance reviews and even modify the review routing. Department administrators can designate departmental administrative staff to manage routing and tracking of reviews.
  - New faculty members, including all those who did not complete a review in PRiSM the previous year, will be assigned a default review route, which typically designates the department chair as the primary reviewer.
  - Faculty members cannot change their designated reviewers or review routing; however, they can email their designated administrative staff directly from PRiSM if they believe a change to the review routing is needed.
  - In order to reduce the number of emails your department receives requesting routing changes, please verify these routes are correct early in the process.
- Department administrators can access review status reports by logging into the [SOM Portal](#), clicking on "PRiSM" and selecting the "Reports" tab at the top.
- Faculty members employed by DHHA are now completing their annual reviews in PRiSM. DHHA faculty members can contact Jonathan Tucker ([Jonathan.Tucker@dhha.org](mailto:Jonathan.Tucker@dhha.org)), Executive Administrative Assistant to Dr. Connie Price, if they need their review routes adjusted.
- Faculty members paid by VAMC and NJH are not required to complete their annual reviews in PRiSM. However, if departments wish to have faculty members paid by these institutions complete their reviews in PRiSM, they may be included in this process.

## Assignment of Overall Performance Ratings

All full-time ( $\geq 0.5$  FTE) School of Medicine faculty members employed by the University of Colorado or Denver Health are required to complete an annual review within PRiSM. At the conclusion of the annual review, University-employed faculty members receive an overall performance rating (Outstanding, Exceeding Expectations, Meeting Expectations, Below Expectations or Not Meeting Expectations). The summary rating is the only information that is sent to Human Resources; this rating becomes a publicly-available record. The remainder of the information in the PRiSM review remains in the faculty member's confidential personnel file.

In 2021, the process for assigning faculty members' overall performance ratings was clarified. While PRiSM allows primary and secondary reviewers to *recommend* a performance rating, the overall final rating is always assigned by the final reviewer, which is the department chair or the chair's designee. This rating is forwarded to Human Resources by the Office of Faculty Affairs at the end of the review process.

## Performance Improvement Agreements and Extensive Reviews

Faculty members who are rated "Below Expectations" or "Not Meeting Expectations" on their annual review must participate in developing and implementing a Performance Improvement Agreement (PIA). The PIA should be put into place within two months after the end of the review cycle. However if the faculty member chooses to appeal their "not meeting expectations" or "below" expectations" rating, the PIA process does not begin until the appeal process is completed. If the faculty member does not meet the goals of the PIA by the next review cycle, an Extensive Review process is initiated. For more information about PIAs (including a template), Extensive Reviews, and the process for faculty members to appeal their annual review, please see the [SOM appeal policy](#). For additional information about the procedures, go to: <https://www.cu.edu/ope/aps/5008>.

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# Appendix: Guide to the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Section

Cleveland Piggott, MD, MPH, FAAFP

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) are core values and important priorities of the University of Colorado School of Medicine (CUSOM). Since 2021, PRISM has asked all faculty members to describe how they are helping support a diverse, inclusive and just culture within the SOM (including the faculty member's department, hospital, laboratory, community or other place of work). For the first time, PRISM also tracks whether faculty members have completed implicit bias, anti-racism or other diversity training in the past two years.

We created this Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) guide to assist faculty members and their reviewers as they consider what to include in PRISM's new DEI section and how to talk about this topic during the review.

## Why is this important?

The CUSOM's missions include education, clinical care, research and community collaborations, all of which seek to advance knowledge and optimize the health of patients and populations. In this light, we are committed to building and sustaining a diverse, equitable and inclusive community of teachers, learners, clinicians, scholars and staff. As outlined in the School's new [Commitment to Diversity](#), diversity is defined broadly, and the School's commitment includes a range of advocacy, service, mentoring and community engagement activities that seek to sustain an inclusive and supportive campus climate, eliminate racism, promote healthier and more resilient communities, and address the social, environmental and economic determinates of health. While CUSOM faculty members have varied responsibilities, we expect that all will contribute to some aspect of this broad DEI mission.

The new DEI section of PRISM provides more than an opportunity to "track" DEI activities. It can also help departments celebrate the DEI work accomplished by faculty members; it also provides an opportunity for reflection and goal setting. Importantly, DEI and advocacy activities are also recognized and valued in the CUSOM promotion review process.

## Is it ok if someone doesn't have anything in the DEI section?

Although we expect some faculty members will have more activities than others, we strongly encourage all faculty to complete this section. It is an important opportunity to consider how DEI efforts support the teaching, research, clinical and service missions of the School. It is important to document DEI efforts and accomplishments, just as one documents accomplishments in teaching, scholarship and other areas. Additionally, we

encourage faculty members to consider creating SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-based) goals for including DEI activities into their work.

What should I be doing with the check boxes regarding implicit bias and diversity training?

If they are unchecked, reviewers should strongly encourage the faculty member to engage in these activities over the course of the next year. The “gold standard” in DEI work is that we should be reminded continuously of our implicit biases, so that we can reflect on them and grow. Additionally, in order to succeed in DEI work, we must commit time to professional development on these issues. These check boxes also enable the departments and the SOM to measure our progress.

As a reviewer, how can I provide feedback to my faculty member when I do not feel knowledgeable or comfortable talking about DEI?

The figure below regarding anti-racism is a good visual of how we grow and change by engaging in DEI learning, reflection and practice. Importantly, while the graphic focuses on racism, the ideas apply to all forms of discrimination and oppression. We are all on the journey together, and we don't go from the fear zone to the growth zone overnight. As a supervisor, your goal is not necessarily to tell the faculty member what to do; rather, it is to encourage them to set goals and push them to think about how they can do things (even very small things) that can move the department and school forward toward a more equitable and just culture. As one example: Encourage the faculty member to establish academic goals that are not only SMART (specific measurable, attainable, relevant and time-based) but are also inclusive and equitable. Establishing goals that are SMART+inclusive+equitable (SMARTIE) can move everyone forward. The SOM Office of Diversity and Inclusion (<https://medschool.cuanschutz.edu/deans-office/diversity-inclusion>), and likely your own department have resources and opportunities for faculty member to engage in DEI activities in large and small ways. Additional resources from the Department of Family Medicine may be found here: (<https://medschool.cuanschutz.edu/family-medicine/Diversity-and-Health-Equity>).

