



SCHOOL OF INFORMATION
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

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SERVICE EXCELLENCE AT THE SCHOOL OF INFORMATION
UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

Introduction

This document aims to outline some of the underlying principles for what constitutes excellence in service at the School of Information (iSchool) and to identify some of the ways that tenure-track faculty within the iSchool can achieve excellence. The document is offered to help faculty members, administrators, and others at the University of Texas at Austin (UT-Austin) and beyond to understand and assess the service philosophy and performance of the iSchool faculty. It will be successful to the extent it helps faculty members reflect on, improve, share, and explain their service activities and to the extent it helps others understand those activities. This document supplements the iSchool's research excellence statement and teaching excellence document, and will support discussion about service excellence by faculty members.

Fundamental Assumptions

This document identifies the most commonly recognized service activities to enhance a faculty member's support of the iSchool, the University of Texas at Austin, and his/her professional discipline to achieve competence (required) and excellence (recommended) in service. We expect faculty members at the iSchool to be nationally recognized leaders in the pursuit of new knowledge, in the research enterprise, and in other facets of professional work. Scholars at the iSchool are also expected to reach the highest level of performance they can in their teaching while recognizing that their first goal should be to accomplish excellence in research as expected in a Tier 1 research institution such as ours, and as reflected in the faculty annual review guidelines. Especially in tough economic times, but indeed always, in the interest of shared vision, faculty should undertake service to share in the advancement of the name and reputation of the iSchool, and share in the provision of an infrastructure that allows us to excel, individually and corporately, in our research and pedagogical endeavors.

Purpose of a Document on Service Excellence

The purpose of this document is to provide additional guidance for iSchool faculty about achieving excellence in service. The "School of Information Annual Review of Faculty Guidelines" document provides information about how the evaluating body expects different levels of involvement of faculty of different ranks. Here we explicitly divide recognized service opportunities into the School, University, and Professional Discipline categories. As with research and teaching, service evaluation will be focused on performance in carrying out assigned duties and on appropriate self-identification of and completion of service opportunities, not on the raw number of duties assigned or undertaken.

This document has one other purpose: to highlight perhaps nontraditional ways of providing service, acknowledging that the evaluating body will recognize a broad range of activities that enhance and advance the mission of the iSchool.

Areas of Service

Service to the iSchool

The smooth administration of the iSchool requires shared responsibility of all faculty and staff. Traditionally recognized, and always-valued, service activities include:

- Serving on committees
- Chairing committees
- Attending colloquia and other professional activities at or sponsored by the iSchool
- Attending other functions such as the Open House and Graduation
- Mentoring junior faculty
- Responding to ad hoc requests of the Dean

Service opportunities that have been less traditionally considered, but are still of value to the mission of the iSchool include:

- Responding to the requests of iSchool administration or staff (e.g., the Director of Development) for tours of labs, demos of faculty or student work, or other hosting of or engagement with other researchers, prospective students, prospective donors, or others who are interested in our School
- Pursuing and carrying out meetings or other contact with hiring managers, information professionals, or related people in industry, government, or other agencies – people who might be sources of capstones, internships, and jobs for our students, sources of research funding, or otherwise advocates for our School
- Authoring non-research articles or making non-research-based presentations that market the iSchool to prospective students, collaborators, donors, and other potential stakeholders
- Attending student-led events, thereby demonstrating support.

Service to the University

Although less immediately useful to the iSchool than service to the iSchool itself, service to the University has its own merits, which the evaluating body considers. Service activities may include:

- Serving on a university committee or the Faculty Council
- Fulfilling special requests related to the University as made by the Dean or other administrators

Service to the Field or Subfield

Of course, given the iSchool's transdisciplinarity, the particular form of professional service opportunities may vary across sub-disciplines. But typical opportunities that will serve our communities, and enhance the individual's own reputation and, by extension, that of the iSchool, would include:

- Reviewing manuscripts for journals or conferences
- Serving on conference committees, or otherwise offering administrative assistance
- Holding leadership positions in professional organizations, locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally
- Serving on editorial boards, or as editor, of journals and other professional organs
- Serving on review panels for funding agencies
- Serving as external reviewers for tenure cases
- Creating opportunities for collaboration across universities

Conclusion

There are many ways for iSchool faculty to pursue and demonstrate excellence in their service. Most if not all of the traditional ways—committee membership and chairing, attendance at iSchool functions, review of manuscripts, assumption of leadership positions in professional societies—are traditional for a reason: Those efforts are needed to provide the infrastructure necessary to allow researchers/scholars/teachers to ply their trade and serve their students, their science, and their society (writ large). The iSchool’s Annual Review of Faculty document should be seen as a sister document to this one, offering guidance on the differing expectations of levels of service across the various faculty ranks. The current document adds to this information by expanding our acknowledged definition of service.