Employment of Variable Hour Officers

Effective Date: April 1, 2014

Policy Statement
Variable hour officers are employees on the University payroll who are performing officer-level work on an irregular and unpredictable basis. The work hours are undefined and vary from work week to work week depending on the nature of the work or project. Variable Hours Officers are limited to a maximum of 999 hours in a rolling 12 month period and should average less than 20 hours in a week. If in any given week the VHO exceeds 40 hours, he/she must be paid one-and-a-half times his/her regular rate of pay for all hours worked in excess of 40 hours per week.

Reason(s) for the Policy
To ensure compliance with Columbia University policies, and applicable laws governing the administration of benefits and wage and hour laws.

Primary Guidance to Which This Policy Responds
Columbia University’s policies and applicable laws governing the administration of benefits and wage and hour laws

Responsible University Office and Officer
Columbia University Human Resources
212-851-7008
hrcs@columbia.edu

Revision History
Original policy issued April 1, 2014

Who is governed by this Policy
All variable hour officers and anyone at the University engaged in hiring or managing variable hour officers, including hiring managers, Departmental Administrators, Academic Department Administrators, local Human Resources Administrators and central Human Resources Client Managers and administrators.

Who should know this Policy
Anyone at the University engaged in hiring or managing variable hour officers, including hiring managers, Departmental Administrators, Academic Department Administrators, local Human Resources Administrators and central Human Resources Client Managers and administrators.

Exclusions and Special Situations
None

Policy Text
Definition:
Variable hour officers are part-time employees on the University payroll who are performing officer-level work on an irregular, unpredictable basis. This means that from work week to work week, the
employee does not average the same or similar number of hours such that it is more appropriate to pay the employee for the exact number of hours worked each week.

**Limitations:**
Variable hour officers should average less than 20 hours per week and may not exceed 999 hours of work for Columbia University in a rolling 12-month period.

A variable hour officer is only permitted to hold one position at a time at the University.

If the employee does not meet the definition of a variable hour officer, please contact your Human Resources Client Manager.

**Hiring Process:**
All variable hour officer (or “VHO”) positions must be entered into Jobs at Columbia (JAC). All Variable hour officer hires must complete an employment application in JAC. A summary of the process is below:

**Posting:** All variable hour officer positions must be created and entered in Jobs at Columbia. If the department already has a candidate for the position then the online waiver process in JAC should be used.

**Application:** The candidate must submit an electronic application through JAC.

**At CUMC Only:**
- Background checks are required for all employees, including variable hours officers.
- Drug screening is also required for all employees who fall under the Joint Commission mandate area, including variable hour officers.
- If the VHO will be working in a clinical capacity that requires medical credentialing, then the credentialing process must be completed prior to hire date.

**Hiring Paperwork:** All applicable hiring paperwork must be submitted to the HRPC via the template-based hire process in a timely fashion. A full description of the required hiring documents can be found in the HR Manager Toolkit. Certain departments may require a background check prior to hiring the variable hour officer. Depending on the nature of the position, this check may include a criminal background check, Social Security number verification, education and employment history verification, an employment reference check, consumer credit check and testing for current illegal drug use.

For a detailed description of the hiring process and steps, please see the hiring guide on the HR website. If you have additional questions, please consult with your HR Client Manager for guidance on the overall hiring process.

**Termination:**
Variable hour officers are “at-will” employees, and there is no guarantee of continued employment. If the 999 hour limit is reached in a rolling 12-month period, the variable hour officer must be terminated.
or converted into a regular or temporary university position. If the 35-hour per work week limit is reached, a Human Resources Client Manager must be consulted, and the employee may be eligible for overtime pay as indicated in the Compensation section below.

**Converting a variable hour position into a regular or temporary university position:**
If a department wishes to convert a variable hour officer position into a regular or temporary university position, all normal Columbia University policies and procedures apply for hiring new employees. These may include job posting (for all officer positions lasting longer than 12 months), interviewing of applicants, and submission of any applicable monitoring paperwork. Please see the Administrative Employment Categories matrix to determine the appropriate employment category based on the type of work and duration of the employment. The Human Resources Client Managers can provide further assistance to appropriately categorize new positions.

When appropriate, based on the job and grade and in collaboration with an HR Client Manager, a department may move an existing variable hour officer into one of the other administrative employment categories. However, in order to avoid a break in service, the department must initiate the hiring process at least one month before the 999 hour limit is reached by the incumbent.

**Rehiring Former variable hour officers:**
Any variable hour officer who has worked the maximum number of hours within a 12 month period may not be employed as a variable hour officer anywhere within the University until he/she has dropped below the 999 hour limit.

**Compensation**
All variable hour officers must be paid at least the minimum hourly rate for the grade and based on the number of hours worked at his or her hourly pay rate. Original completed and signed timesheets must be kept on file in the department. A standard timesheet can be found on the Human Resources website at: [http://managers.hr.columbia.edu/time-attendance/tracking-time/casual-employment](http://managers.hr.columbia.edu/time-attendance/tracking-time/casual-employment). Lump sum payments are not allowed for compensating variable hours officers.

Even though variable hour officers are not permitted to work more than 35 hours in a week, if a VHO does perform overtime work (in excess of 40 hours) during a work week, they will be paid at the overtime rate of one-and-a-half times their regular hourly rate for all overtime work actually performed. Working unauthorized overtime may lead to disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment.

Please consult with your HR Client Manager if you have any questions.

**Restrictions and limits on use of variable hour officers:**
The variable hour officer category is restricted to **officer-level** work which is unpredictable and variable from week to week and meets the hour limitations described in the Definitions section above. In addition, the following types of individuals **cannot** be hired as variable hours officers:

**Academic Officers:** Any person who will be teaching, working with students as an adviser, doing collaborative research, or performing the duties of a professional librarian cannot be hired.
as a variable hours officer. Instead, these individuals must be given a faculty appointment or appointed as an officer of research, an officer of the libraries or a student officer, and hired using the academic nomination process. Please contact the office of your dean/executive vice president or the Assistant Provost for Academic Appointments (for Morningside appointments) or the Director of the Office of Faculty Affairs (for CUMC appointments) if you are unsure whether a person should have an academic appointment or how the person should be compensated.