



## Department Chair Online Resource Center

### Making Faculty Evaluation Count

David J. Malik and N. Douglas Lees. "Making Faculty Evaluation Count." *The Department Chair* 11(2) (fall 2000): 6-8. Reprinted with permission from [Anker Publishing, Inc.](#)

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The evaluation of faculty for the assessment of productivity and quality has been a longstanding activity, perhaps a burden, for chairs, committees, and administrators at colleges and universities. The process begins during the recruitment of new faculty, with faculty groups, chairs, and administrators playing major roles, and proceeds with varying regularity throughout the career of a faculty member.

Beyond the initial reviews that lead to tenure and the first promotion in rank, the internal review process becomes less predictable across universities and varies within different units of the same institution. What those outside the academy fail to recognize is that active faculty are constantly undergoing external review of the quality and value of their ideas and products. External review of manuscripts, books, artistic creations and other scholarly pieces, proposals for funding projects, and even award nominations occur throughout the career of faculty.

Despite all these instances of faculty evaluation, there are still continuing demands that the contributions of faculty be more closely and routinely evaluated and documented. This is becoming most evident in the rapidly growing adoption of policies for the review of faculty following the tenure decision. The prevailing public perception seems to be that faculty are not held accountable for their contribution to the institution, its students, and the community at large after tenure has been granted. While those of us in the academy realize that this is not the case for the vast majority of faculty, this perception has been a driving force leading to policies for post-tenure review.

The post-tenure review movement clearly is a major stimulus to revisit the issue of faculty evaluation. Although the process may have been loosely structured in the past for full professors, evaluation in some form must have been made in institutions where merit pay is employed. In fact, institutions are now increasingly expected to provide merit increases as a function of productivity and this, in turn, requires more specific annual assessment of faculty performance. Thus, there is emerging a closer connection between the concept of "merit" and the evaluation process.

With this pervasive expansion of the review process, we offer several issues that can play a valuable role in maximizing the effectiveness of the review as well as potentially increasing its positive consequences.

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**Participate in internal and external programs focusing on faculty evaluation and development.** It is widely recognized that department chairs receive no formal training for that position. It is also true that they lack preparation to adequately address the expectations and the potential consequences of post-tenure review. These issues are on the agendas of national professional organizations, such as the American Association for Higher Education, which has also instituted a grant program to address these shortcomings. In the absence of participating in these national forums, campuses, especially through faculty development offices, should strive to create chair development sessions. In the absence of the above, national conferences offer training for chairs, such as the Kansas State University Chairpersons Conference, or the American Council on Education workshops.

**Develop buy-in by collaborating with faculty in developing measures for performance.** The chair must be more deliberate in establishing acceptable measures on which to evaluate faculty. This might best be done in collaboration with the faculty in an attempt to define what products, activities, and behaviors represent appropriate contributions for the unit and the institution. This discussion can take into account the mission, goals, culture, traditions, and aspirations of the department and will generate a faculty-accepted and public set of measures on which they agree to be evaluated. In the review process, the chair then must equitably credit faculty when they achieve the items identified. Since the measures have been set as defining fundamental outcomes expected of the unit, they should reflect the same measures used in evaluation schemes such as those for promotion and tenure and for merit pay.

**Developing collaborative evaluation measures with faculty has several advantages.** First, it encourages faculty buy-in and makes certain that everyone knows how and on what basis he or she will be evaluated. It also allows for a set of measures in each category of faculty work that is broad enough to include all valuable types of faculty contribution, thus allowing for different levels of participation. Faculty may then work in areas where they can best contribute and accept that not everyone needs to contribute in exactly the same way to the overall goals of the unit.

**Identify multiple applications for faculty evaluation.** While clearly the purpose of faculty evaluation embraces summative (evaluative focus) and formative (constructive development and improvement) objectives, the chair can exploit the consequences of the review data by informing different publics on the successes of the department. Recognizing that the faculty are the "value



creators" in the department for the teaching and discovery research missions as well as service contributors, the chair can now publicize the successes and accomplishments of faculty individually and collectively.

**Engage in short- and long-term career planning with faculty.** Faculty evaluation should be done on a regular basis through a mechanism, such as an annual review, which provides the opportunity to review the accomplishments of the past year. This summative function is historical and objective and provides valuable information that can be used to compare performance among faculty. A well-done review should also have a developmental or formative component that allows the faculty member to set appropriate goals, correct deficiencies, and identify resources that permit increased productivity. During the review, long-term objectives can be identified and a master plan for future activities can be constructed. The expanded role of the annual review will require that it be more carefully constructed and broad in scope to address these evolving applications.

**Be consistent in faculty evaluation, yet allow discretion.** Many measures we have examined at our institution, although varying in the level of quantitative detail, have common elements important to applications for merit and post-tenure review. First, our local examples take into account a wide range of faculty contributions to teaching, research, and service. Second, they all allow for the application of a quantitative metric so that comparisons among faculty can be made. Finally, our local examples allow some level of chair discretion and flexibility to better address the wide range of scholarly accomplishments that are either unanticipated or novel.

**Ensure that evaluation results in improvement.** Faculty evaluation should target faculty development and career enhancement. Chairs should use measures developed for faculty evaluation to help shape the long-term career development of faculty in ways in which they can maintain productivity as they change career emphasis. Although not widely acknowledged previously, faculty may wish to change the primary nature of their work and alter the mix of their institutional contributions that will place new demands on formative evaluation. The evaluation process must provide opportunity to celebrate success as well as to identify areas where improvement is desired.



**Balance faculty aspirations with unit and campus missions and priorities.** Governing boards, public agendas, and public responsibilities and accountability all shape university agendas in ways that are often in conflict with faculty aspirations and objectives. These conflicts stress faculty and result in threats to their security, personal incentives and interests, and values. Evaluation must resolve this conflict by establishing clear consequences of value to the institution, yet also support through concrete roles and rewards the common departmental values and needs of the faculty. In those institutions where the disparity between faculty and campus goals are greatest, maintaining high faculty morale will be challenging.

**Recognize that most faculty are internally motivated: Pros and cons of merit review of faculty.** Any faculty evaluation system will have its strengths and weaknesses, each will have its positive elements, and each will generate some disadvantages and unintended consequences. On the positive side, merit evaluation of faculty allows for differential reward based on best performance. It also provides clear priorities as to what is valued and functions as a stimulus to faculty to work toward some subset of identified measures. Such a merit system allows the unit and institution to verify that faculty rewards are based on performance measures and determined by an explicit evaluation process.

Some of the negative aspects of evaluation schemes are the linking of faculty work to rigid reward formulas. There will always be questions regarding how the quantitative metric is applied to outcomes and products. Differing values for specific products and activities perceived by faculty can sometimes emerge, especially in units that are changing in emphasis and those with new, elevated aspirations. Performance evaluations also force faculty to realize that there is a "below average" population.

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