

## ***Faculty Evaluation: Challenges, Best Practices, & Suggestions***

2017-01-18

### **Summary:**

The Council of Chairs and Directors spent two hours discussing faculty evaluation. The first four questions were presented and people then formed groups around tables to focus on the question of their choice. Each table was asked to elect a **reporter**, who would share the suggestions from the group at the conclusion of the first hour, and a **panelist**, who fielded questions from the audience in the second hour. The first two pages represent comments and best practices that were reported out during the first hour. The remaining pages list questions that were presented to the panelists, followed by their answers. A number of themes emerged:

- Evaluation is a high-intensity process where the stakes are low in terms of salary increments.
- There was uniform concern about cloudiness surrounding merit versus cost-of-living salary increases.
- The variation in the evaluation process across campus is bad for morale. It would be best to have a more uniform approach with clear rubrics for evaluation.
- Department Heads and Directors feel torn between the requirement to perform a summative evaluation and the desire to mentor in a more formative way.

### **Question 1-Goals of Faculty Evaluation**

- This is critical for letting faculty know if they are on the right track for promotion
- Summative vs Formative Evaluation: Formative/mentoring is ideal, but summative is necessary for salary purposes. For department heads, 75-100% of process is summative/whether the candidate is progressing, 0-25% is mentoring.
- The evaluation is rank dependent (pre-tenure vs. tenured going for promotion),
- In addition to evaluations from the department head, junior faculty should also be reviewed by tenured faculty.
- A metrics rubric is used in some departments in the summative process in order to determine merit
- *Best practice:* Send the evaluation document to the faculty member as a draft before the evaluation meeting.
- Across the campus, there is a great deal of variation in due dates, process (all at once or over time), and delivery (bulk vs serial).
- We should make it a point to incorporate institute's strategic goals into the evaluation process.
- Faculty perception of the goals of the evaluation process varies widely.
- *Best practice:* Transparency is very attractive.
- *Best practice:* Merit needs to be clearly explained to reduce confusion (i.e., is 2% max or average?).
- *Best practice:* Simplify and shorten the evaluation process to save time and resources.
- *Best practice:* Pre-tenure faculty require extensive support, communicating progress is an important component.
- *Best practice:* Senior faculty going through promotion process should be instructed to start on external letters as soon as possible after achieving rank of associate professor

### Question 2-Self-evaluation

- Some departments have forms-this is generally a good idea.
- Perhaps the plan of work should be annotated to describe progress.
- *Best practice:* Forms should be designed to address the plan of work rather than focus on self-promotion.
- *Best practice:* The plan of work template should include prompts to discuss teaching and publications.
- *Best practice:* The Plan of work should be more formalized; one part with expectations and a second part with aspirations so the plan of work is both ambitious and realistic.
- *Best practice:* Plan of work should be a public document within the department

### Question 3-Evaluation Meeting

- *Best practice:* Establish clear expectations.
- *Best practice:* Be consistent and specific about evaluation expectations.
- *Best practice:* Have a multi-year plan for research that reinforces positive behavior.

### Question 4-Outcome of Evaluation

- A 1-2-3 rating system may be more appropriate than a 1-5 scale
- Faculty agreement on what is expected to be 3, 4, and 5 (or 2, 3, and 4)
- We should consider hanging the length of the evaluation period depending on where people are in their career. It might be best to have shorter evaluations, longer periods (2 for assoc. professors and 3 for full professors)
- Communicate with all faculty members that everyone starts at a 3, and goes up or down from there.
- We should recognize that people who become faculty are usually high performers-expect 4s and 5s.
- The evaluation process seems punitive and time consuming, damages morale.
- One challenge is how to factor collegiality in the evaluation process.
- Changes to the process could improve morale
- There is really not enough money to be considered 'merit' so maybe the salary increments should perhaps be considered a cost-of-living adjustment.
- *Best practice:* Some departments created definitions for teaching service and scholarship at different numeric levels
- *Best practice:* Rubrics are critical for rating system and should exist at all levels. Then 4's and 5's are fine if people are doing work that matches the rubric
- *Best practice:* For high performing faculty, consider if salary is a driving force, or would perks (free parking, semester release, gift cards) be a better incentive?

### 30 minutes of panel discussion, Q&A

Q. How can we make collegiality part of the evaluation process?

Panel:

- We ultimately have to live and work with our colleagues. Having an environment of civility is important to be effective as a faculty member and as a department.
- Collegiality could be included in the summary; this would include high-performers who are difficult to work with.
- Within CAST, collegiality is included and is one of the expectations for evaluation. It's not something that comes up only when there's a problem.
- Psychology has guidelines for collegiality in their department, and it also comes out in the service segment of evaluation. It's a challenge to balance civility and disagreement.
- Collegiality is an element of service, if you are not attending/participating/being active in your department, you are not being of service to your college.
- It is difficult to balance between civility and the ability to disagree.

Q. If you could change one thing about the evaluation process what would you change?

- Colleges approach evaluation very differently. The policy implies a uniformity that doesn't exist. The connection with salary is difficult; faculty disagree with HR's assertion that 3 should be the average faculty evaluation score. This is relativistic and many faculty/chairs would prefer an absolutist approach. The evaluation process should be separate from the merit process. I would detach salary process and evaluations.
- Separate the merit process from performance review
- I would establish a cost of living increase for the entire university, so that regardless of merit, you are able to keep pace with the economy.
- A faculty assessment mechanism for teaching would be a great help; measuring how faculty are teaching students and supporting student success.
- I wish HR understood what an academic and a scholar is. There is a mismatch between what they are mandating and what we actually do.
- I wish there was a better way to award exceptional high achievers. There is little department heads can do to demonstrated their appreciation.

Q. Should evaluations be on the academic year or the calendar year?

- As awkward as the mechanism is, we are required to do it this way. Legal mandates that the evaluation spans the contract period which often overlaps 2 or 3 plans of work.
- Academic year makes more sense; at NTID faculty have worked on an academic year appraisal system and only switched to the calendar year in the last few years due to legal affairs mandate.

Q. Difference in workloads among faculty without a differentiation in salary?

- One option is weighting, where new or more challenging classes are weighted differently than others.

- Fluctuating enrollment numbers often cause problems with trying to keep things even; for example, large enrollments might require additional sections.
- This has been brought up anecdotally but after analysis the difference is much less dramatic. It is often more perception than reality.
- Conferring with all faculty within the department to resolve how course loads are balanced can be helpful and provides a sense of fairness.
- Try to get the department faculty to agree on definitions; try to work with department faculty to resolve ambiguities.
- If you are doing the job, you should get full merit; you're doing the job or you're not
  - Academia is a petty environment
- Move away from annual cycle (2-3 years?); need better rewards to people upon promotion

Q. Most people are able to maintain a balance between teaching, scholarship, and service. If someone is doing their job and keeping the balance, they should receive the maximum merit. A pass/fail system may be easier when it comes to merit, which currently rewards people for incremental levels of achievement.

- I support that idea but don't think it's realistic or will be supported by HR. Academic one of the most petty environments, and people will get upset over a small amount of money.
- If we're going to maintain a system where merit runs from 1.5-3.5, faculty could live with it especially if there was more money given at promotion and cost of living was incorporated.
- A capital campaign needs to be started to increase salaries so that departments are able to compete with peer universities. The campaign should emphasize salaries over construction of new buildings.

Q. How would you respond to a cost of living increase applied to those achieving a 3 or higher, and then the department would be able to be flexible in distributing the COL funds?

- It would make the process less antagonistic. Worth talking about it.
- Good idea
- I support it.
- It would be helpful.
- Comment: I made more as a lecturer at Cornell than as a tenure track faculty member at RIT. Until there is a serious effort to increase wages it will continue to fuel dissatisfaction. A cost of living increase should be applied, especially to staff and then to faculty.

Q. A lot of firms are moving away from performance evaluation and towards continuous feedback and performance development. Would you be comfortable in that role?

- I try to apply this in my work and use this as the model for my own personal development. I've tried to encourage faculty to embrace this mindset as well, so that department heads are more of a resource rather than an evaluator. For example, I send my evaluation to faculty long before we meet so they know what to expect and there are no surprises. Concerns are expressed orally, and then move to a written document if no progress is made, and this has been very effective.
- I have been trying to meet more frequently with faculty rather than just the annual evaluation. I also use the evaluation as a starting point for a conversation. When the plan of work is formed, I let them know if they complete it what their rating would be (meets or succeeds, etc. )

- In the private sector, the people responsible for the assessments and evaluations are doing that as their full time job, where department heads have to do that in addition to their own teaching, research and service work.

Q. What are your thoughts on transparency regarding the plan of work?

- For pre-tenure faculty there is some transparency because the tenured faculty see them as part of the review process in CLA. In each college, definition and expectations of what a department chair does is different. Some have 5 or six reviews each year, others have 40-this is a much different workload. Compare this to a public university where salary is completely separate.

Q. (to meeting participants) How many of you aspired to be chairs?

- I think most of us didn't aspire to be department heads, but rather saw a need and stepped up.
- No uniformity in what the department chair role is; expectations vary; compensation for chair work
- If I use 'meets expectations' as the norm, and then they proceed to get tenure, am I doing a disservice to my colleagues to serve HR?
- Important to be consistent within the college so college committees are normed to this process
- Important to have separation in order to promote improvement and development
- HR issues are very different from faculty issues/perspectives

Q. In GCCIS, changes to the evaluation process and ratings were implemented at the college level, so there was consistency among the departments. It was a painful process but things have generally settled out.

- This was also done in CAST. If you don't make adjustments, you end up settling for mediocrity.
- Each college has their own promotion guidelines; to get promoted you need to be above average.
- Making the department average have to be a three you're not doing anyone in the department a favor.

Wrap-up