# Evaluating Faculty Performance

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## Introduction

In the past, promotion, retention, and tenure decisions in higher education were primarily based on factors other than faculty academic merit. The factors considered in the evaluation focused more on the behavior of the faculty member (e.g., the ability to get along with peers and administrators) rather than on his or her performance (Whitman & Weiss, 1982). During the 1960s, many colleges and universities were expanding and administrators were in need of locating and retaining faculty members. In the 1970s, higher education in the U.S. was affected by declining student enrollments, decreasing financial resources, and increasing operational costs (Whitman & Weiss, 1982). Administrators were forced to revise their procedures for making personnel decisions. Interest in faculty performance has become more apparent during the last 10 years and higher education is attempting to develop faculty evaluation programs that are more systematic and comprehensive than those used in the past.

## The Purposes of Faculty Evaluations

Faculty evaluations serve two main purposes: to provide information for the improvement of performance and to assist decision makers regarding promotion and salary increases (Dick, 1981). The formative and summative components of faculty performance evaluation have been identified in several studies (Centra, 1993, 1986; Whitman & Weiss, 1982; Dick, 1981). Formative evaluation is intended for faculty improvement, while summative evaluation is designed to provide data for personnel decisions (Dick, 1981). One of the main outcomes of the evaluation process should be to improve the quality of instruction (O'Leary & Fenton, 1990); in reality most of the information obtained from faculty performance evaluation is more readily used for personnel decisions rather than for faculty development and improvement (Whitman & Weiss, 1982). If faculty improvement is considered one of the major purposes of the evaluation process, then college ad-

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ministrators should assign more emphasis to the formative evaluation component (Dottin, 1987; Olswang & Lee, 1985). During the evaluation process, administrators and faculty members should focus on the accomplishment of personal goals and the improvement of performance (O'Leary & Fenton, 1990).

Another goal of faculty evaluation is to provide information for accountability (Olswang & Lee, 1985). Increasingly, academic institutions are required to account for funding received from private donors, state legislators, the federal government, and foundations; therefore, college administrators are requesting faculty members to document the use of their time among teaching, research, and service activities. Requiring faculty members to account for their time and to defend their actions may result in faculty burnout (Todd-Mancillas, 1987) and a negative, uncooperative attitude toward the review process (Moses, 1984).

## Measuring Teaching, Research, and Service Activities

Collecting both qualitative and quantitative measures of faculty performance is important. The relationship between the quantity of teaching, research, and service activities and the quality of these activities is a critical question. In most faculty evaluation systems, quantitative data on teaching, research, and service are over-emphasized to the exclusion of qualitative data (Todd-Mancillas, 1987). Research productivity is commonly determined by the amount of research dollars generated and the number of articles published while service performance is measured by the amount of time devoted to committees and on-campus/off-campus activities (Dottin, 1987). Research activities have the least amount of conflict regarding personnel decisions supposedly because of their objective nature (e.g., the number of refereed articles). On the other hand, measuring teaching performance is more subjective. Teaching is commonly quantified by mean scores derived from standardized forms (Dottin, 1987). Centra (1993, 1986) suggests the use of qualitative descriptions of classroom instruction in addition to quantitative judgments through the use of rating scales. Qualitative measures could include appropriateness of course objectives, value of instructional materials, level of student achievement, faculty-developed portfolios, teacher knowledge of subject matter, and student ratings of teacher performance.

Faculty evaluation programs are attempting to increase objectivity for the areas of teaching, research, and service through both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The issue of who should provide information on faculty performance in the areas of teaching, research, and service needs to be addressed. No one source of information has been found to be the most effective (Fisher, Schoenfeldt, & Shaw, 1990). To achieve quantitative objectivity in faculty evaluation programs, data must be collected from multiple sources such as students, peers, self, and administrators (Whitman & Weiss, 1982). Peer evaluation has been recommended as an important factor for evaluating teaching performance (Centra, 1986; Dick, 1981). Some studies have indicated that when peer evaluations are based exclusively on classroom observations, inter-reliability is very low (Centra, 1986). Studies of the validity and reliability of faculty performance evaluation instruments and data analysis procedures have produced inconclusive and conflicting results (Bruce, 1985; Hansen & Rogers, 1984). A common misconception of faculty performance evaluation is the assumption that competence in one area confirms competence in another area. However, a study conducted by Centra (1981) indicates that the relationship between teaching performance and research productivity is virtually non-existent.

## Weighting Teaching, Research, and Service

Although faculty members are expected to perform in all three areas of teaching, research, and service, the functions are not viewed equally during the evaluation process; one of the functions may be over-emphasized. Which function receives the most attention seems to be based on several factors. One of the factors related to the weighting of teaching, research, and service activities is the size of the educational institution (Clement, Stevens, & Brenenstuhl, 1985). Smaller schools place greater weight on teaching and larger schools place greater emphasis on research. College administrators tend to under- estimate the importance and value of the service area in facult evaluation (Dick, 1981). In most colleges and universities, the lowest weight assigned to faculty responsibilities is the area of service (Whitman & Weiss, 1982). Dick (1981) reported that public and community service is infrequently recognized and rewarded by most administrators. Similarly, when the quality of teaching performance is considered important by most administrators, its weight on personnel decisions is questionable. Administrators may assign additional weight to research productivity because it is more easily quantified than teaching performance (Centra, 1986). However, some faculty members believe that teaching and research should be given equal weight (Moses, 1984). Other studies suggested that the faculty member should identify where the emphasis of his or her work lies. Faculty involvement in the weighting process is in agreement with an evaluation plan proposed by McLean (1987) in which a list of activities prepared by the faculty member is shared with the unit administrator to negotiate assignments and weight activities. The variable weight approach, as a means to conduct faculty evaluation, has been used by a few institutions (Centra, 1986). Variable weighting allows faculty members to select in advance an area of their performance which would be assigned extra weight during that evaluation year.

## Involving Faculty in the Evaluation Process

The literature indicates that a successful evaluation system must include input from the faculty (O'Leary & Fenton, 1990). Although faculty members may be involved during the development of departmental policies regarding performance evaluation (Bortz, 1984), their active participation during the process is usually limited. Evaluation is an activity that is done to the faculty rather than by and for the faculty (Whitman & Weiss, 1982). If one of the purposes of evaluation is for performance improvement, then some type of mechanism must be available to insure faculty involvement in the process. Faculty members need to interact directly with their department chair to identify which activities and responsibilities will be emphasized during the review process (Moses, 1984). Faculty participation in the setting of evaluation goals and the identification of evaluation criteria is important (O'Leary & Fenton, 1990; Moses, 1984). Centra (1986) supports the use of an ad hoc committee of colleagues to evaluate faculty teaching performance. Few studies specifically outline the procedures for faculty involvement in the evaluation process. However, one study highlights the role of peer reviews in the evaluation of faculty performance (Centra, 1986). Peer review, especially of faculty teaching activities, is one method for involving faculty directly in the evaluation process. Centra warns, though, that colleagues must observe several classroom situations and review teaching materials if peer reviews are to serve a valid and reliable role in the evaluation process.

## Implementing an Evaluation Plan

Evaluation plans contain a series of events and activities that are conducted for a specific purpose or goal, usually for promotion/tenure and salary increase decisions. A single method for implementing a plan for evaluating faculty performance does not emerge from the literature. Although different evaluation plans are outlined in the literature, few common characteristics are apparent. Evaluation plans normally involve some type of formal documentation of faculty performance in the three areas of teaching, research, and service (Dottin, 1987; Bortz, 1884). However, a limited number of quantitative measures appears to dominate the types of information collected, especially in the areas of research and service. Evaluation plans should include a means for faculty self evaluation and goal setting by encouraging faculty to clearly specify the areas of emphasis for the review process (O'Leary & Fenton, 1990; McLean, 1987). A humanistic evaluation plan suggested by Dottin (1987) fosters the linking of teaching, research, and service activities with stated goals and objectives to assist faculty in understanding the purposes of the review process. Faculty support, prior knowledge, flexibility, and adequate resources are critical factors for the successful implementation of any evaluation plan (McLean, 1987).

## Implications for Colleges of Agriculture

Faculty performance evaluation plays an important role in providing feedback for faculty improvement and in assisting administrators with personnel decisions. Formative and summative evaluation components should be the major purposes or outcomes of a faculty evaluation system, with college administrators focusing more on the improvement of faculty performance during the review process. Emphasizing the formative aspects of the evaluation process could enhance the outcomes of the summative evaluation.

The literature indicates that quantitative data are overemphasized in measuring faculty productivity in the areas of research and service. Both qualitative and quantitative measures should be employed when collecting data for assessing faculty performance. No one source of information has been found to be the most effective in appraising the various dimensions of faculty performance. The use of multiple sources (i.e., student ratings, peers, administrators) is perhaps the best approach to use regardless of which specific method of measuring performance is adopted. Faculty and administrators need to work in conjunction to establish standards and criteria that both parties understand and agree on.

In general, faculty functions are not assessed equally during the evaluation process. Sometimes the way faculty functions are viewed and assessed during the evaluation process is not in concordance with the mission of the department and/or university. This lack of coordination between the review process and the departmental mission might create faculty confusion and dissatisfaction. Faculty members should be involved in the weighting process, with their interests and capabilities being considered in the weighting of specific activities. Faculty ownership in the evaluation plan may help to reduce faculty burnout.

Input from the faculty has been considered crucial for the success of any evaluation system. If faculty ownership is an important aspect of the review process, then faculty members must be directly and actively involved in the development and implementation of evaluation activities. Peer review is one method of involving faculty directly in the evaluation process. Faculty members should be encouraged to participate in peer review evaluation programs. Special consideration, however, should be given to design training programs that would assist peer reviewers to produce reliable performance ratings.

Evaluation plans should state clear goals and objectives to assist faculty in understanding the purposes or aims of the review process. The performance of faculty members must be accurately assessed, the rewards provided as a result of the evaluation process must truly be of value to faculty, and educational institutions must design performance-based reward systems that faculty members perceive as being fairly administered. A vital feature of the evaluation process is to provide an avenue for assessing the process itself. Little research has been conducted that evaluates the review process to determine the effectiveness and suitability of a review process in accomplishing its purposes or goals. To be effective, an evaluation plan must garner faculty support and understanding,

provide for both qualitative and quantitative measures of performance, and accurately reflect faculty accomplishments.

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