Academic LEADER TODAY
SPECIAL REPORT

# LEADING WITH INTENTION: Faculty Development and Evaluation

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# Department Chairs and Old Turtles

*Randel D. Brown, PhD, and Lorraine M. Dinkel, PhD*

Teaching has been the one constant in my life. I have not been away from the classroom for longer than the months of summer for the past 50 years. In many ways, teaching is what I live for, it's what I do, and it's who I am. Several years ago, my department chair mentioned that she would like to attend my class during the following week. At first I was concerned. Maybe she had heard something bad about my teaching. And then I thought perhaps she had heard something good and just wanted to see it for herself. Either way, I felt a little bit apprehensive. Why? I was relatively confident about my abilities in the classroom. I had often invited her to come to class in the past.

I think the apprehension came from the fact that teaching, by nature, is a solitary endeavor. While others are involved in the process, it's primarily the teacher's responsibility to create that enchanting environment in which learning takes place. Allowing others into my classroom indicated a willingness to let them get closer to me, to let them intercede for me, to let them see me as I am. The day of the observation brought little relief until I began to teach. Like most teachers, I became absorbed in the discussion, almost forgetting the presence of my chair in the classroom until she excused herself and left. At that point, the apprehension returned and the self-doubt surfaced. The real relief came during our conference to discuss my teaching. Her discourse centered mainly on the things she was delighted to see in my classroom and wished to include in her own teaching. She, of course, had several suggestions to make the experience better for my students. I recognized through the experience that having someone in my classroom was not something to fear but rather something that could help me hone my skills and produce better outcomes for my students. The real credit goes to my chair for modeling the spirit with which one approaches an observation conference. She focused on reinforcing the good practice and nurturing the shortfalls she identified. Her comments were formed as thoughtful suggestions and not mandates.

Teaching is second nature to me, but being a department chair did not come easily to me. Recently I've been thinking a lot about my experience of working with my department chair, because it is the time of year when I schedule teaching observations for the professors in my department. After several years of serving as department chair and many more as a professor, I can't seem to figure out how to alleviate the apprehension of those being observed. When I mention upcoming observations, it's as though I have just announced the latest plague. It gives me that odd feeling of not being exactly wanted.

Recently, when I attempted to help a colleague with a problem, I realized that not everyone wants to be my friend or desires my assistance. It reminded me of an encounter with a turtle many years ago. Albrey and Jesse (my two oldest children) had gone out of town for the weekend and Taylor, Cadie (my two youngest children), and I were left to fend for ourselves. This gave us a chance to do some things we wouldn't have done otherwise. We watched *Jurassic Park* and had popcorn, candy, and Cokes for dinner. Several days later I was making my daily one-hour trek from work to home down old Highway 51 when I spotted a grand old box turtle attempting to navigate his way to the far side of the road. Remembering that those large animals I had seen in the movie are now extinct, and having read about species of turtle that are currently endangered, I dutifully stopped to assist this one to cross the road to prevent his premature demise. When I picked him up I was so entranced by his obvious maturity (judging by the rings on his shell he was about 30 to 40 years old) I decided to take him home to show Taylor.

The trip home was interesting to say the least. I assumed that within a few minutes we would be fast friends or at least tolerate each other's presence. This was not the case. This turtle made such a nuisance

of himself, crawling all over the car, hissing, and leaving his evidence everywhere he wandered, that I finally had to admit defeat and turn him safely loose in a pasture several miles from my house.

I spent the remainder of the trip contemplating the plight of this turtle. I decided that it was his loss not to have me as a friend and benefactor. He was in such apparent danger when we met, yet he neither appreciated nor desired my intervention. I believe he surely would have died without my aid. I didn't take into account the fact that he had already spent 40 years or so navigating his own crossings without my assistance. The fact that turtles by nature do not make friends seemed to elude me. They spend their lives in seclusion, without family or friends, utterly alone. And yet they live relatively long lives.

As a department chair, professor, and teacher I find it too easy to adopt the attitude of turtles. It is easy to isolate oneself and refuse the company and support of others who share the same goals. I have seen the turtle behavior in many new and experienced college professors. The tendency to close themselves in their shells is common. I know it provides for them a feeling of safety. They erroneously believe that as long as they stay protected in their shells, they will avoid harm. What is not so apparent to them is they will also miss the opportunity of sharing insights and skills. Turtles can stay in their shells for long periods of time; however, they will come out if they perceive no danger. The key to bringing college professors out of their shells is to remove the perception of harm. Chairs can remove the perceived threat by reminding faculty of their expertise in their discipline, their experience in the field, and their foundation in research. In a sense, all faculty need to understand that chairs know and appreciate their quality and ingenuity. Being part of a group of colleagues has given me the opportunity to let some other people into that private space of teaching. What a release it is to share with other teachers the successes, failures, trials, joys, and accomplishments of the classroom. There are so many answers that come up in simple conversations and other interactions with my teaching colleagues and friends. I pray that I never adopt the attitude of turtles. I am sure that without the intervention of friends and colleagues I would have long ago become an extinct teacher.

*As a department chair, professor, and teacher I find it too easy to adopt the attitude of turtles. It is easy to isolate oneself and refuse the company and support of others who share the same goals.*

Opening up my classroom to my teaching colleagues and friends might allow us to collaborate in the teaching and observation process, reassuring my colleagues with the message that we are who we are. Maybe next year when it is again time to make classroom observations, I will invite my colleagues to come to my class for an observation before I schedule a time to go to theirs. Prior to the visit, we could meet and discuss our student evaluations from the previous semester and look for areas of strength and areas of needed growth. Through this discussion we would formalize goals for improving teaching in the coming year. This meeting would establish a feeling between us as colleagues rather than chair to faculty. After this consultation between colleagues, we would visit each other's classrooms to analyze our efforts to improve outcomes for students. Our next meeting would be a time to assess our progress and refine our goals. This could become an ongoing event between teaching colleagues. In this way we become genuine partners in the evaluation process and not isolated turtles struggling to cross the road.

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# Making Faculty Development an Institutional Value and a Professional Practice

*Henry W. Smorynski, PhD*

Sometimes faculty development programs are inherited by an academic leader, and other times they must be built. In either case, the academic leader needs to heed some wisdom from the Chinese classic the *Tao Te Ching*. Faculty development is a long journey wherever one starts; like a journey of 1,000 miles, it begins with the first step. Faculty development is also to be understood as a destination. Only if one has a clearly identified end for it will it achieve its desired destination—a highly effective and participatory faculty.

Faculty development program success begins with recruiting faculty to a specific institution's mission during the recruitment and interview process. Bringing faculty into an institution who are not committed to its teaching, research, and service mission incentives and imperatives will lead to mismatches between faculty career aspirations and institutional resource commitments. Such mismatches undermine collegiality and undercut faculty development efforts. Hiring faculty who are overly focused on their discipline versus teaching and the school's mission will lead to faculty dissatisfaction and turnover, with negative consequences for the classroom and within academic departments.

Beyond successful hiring, faculty programs will founder if they do not have a strong advocate at the highest level of academic administration. If the academic leader does not acquire and distribute resources consistent with the mission of the institution, wrong messages are sent. Faculty can become committed to one specific type of educational innovation. They can seek release time for their own career interests rather than the mutual interests of the institution and the faculty member. And they will come to view faculty development more as a competition for resources or an activity undervalued by the institution. Only strong academic administration leadership can provide the direction and energy necessary for a high-quality faculty development program. No faculty development director or coordinator, or even a faculty development resource office, can make up for the lack of a clear, constant, and resource-committed academic leader who visibly promotes and rewards effectively institutional mission-inspired faculty development.

A third key ingredient in faculty development success is choosing the right point person to be the daily spokesperson. Improper selection of the faculty development coordinator or director can sink any program. One needs to avoid choosing the most innovative faculty member in the college or university. One should also not choose a faculty member well known for a particular kind of teaching, like case studies or computer simulations. The selection of the faculty development director or coordinator should be driven both by his or her commitment to all kinds of development and experimentation in teaching and research, and by widespread colleague acceptance and confidence. Only a few faculty in any institution will meet both these criteria. Without both characteristics being present in the faculty development coordinator or director, the overall faculty development program and faculty participation in it will be limited to only highly motivated faculty or select faculty departments. It will never gain large-scale participation rates (over 75 percent). It will not reflect the necessary vitality to change and innovate as theories, methods, and research in higher education change regarding best practices.

A fourth element of a successful faculty development program involves the creation of a common basis for development efforts shared by the faculty as a whole. Although not widely accepted or understood by faculties in general, the work of L. Dee Fink can be very beneficial in creating that basis. His concepts articulated in *Creating Significant Learning Experiences: An Integrated Approach to Designing College Courses* can provide a common basis for faculty across all disciplines. By creating courses through a learner-centered approach versus a subject-oriented approach, one opens up the faculty to innovation, experimentation, and good teaching practice sharing, which are all vital to a healthy faculty development program. His model of an integrated course design brings together four key elements—learning situational factors, learning goals, teaching and learning activities, and feedback and assessment—into a powerful combination through the idea of "backward course design." This means the syllabus and course are designed from student learning objectives and not subject matter coverage.

If one has built these four elements into a faculty development program, then one needs to complement them with an anchoring and reinforcing faculty performance evaluation system. Tenure, promotion, and merit pay, where applicable, must identify faculty development as a key measurement for the evaluation and rewarding of faculty. A lack of consistency between academic leader messaging and promotion and tenure criteria used in any institution will doom any faculty development program to be engaged in primarily by true believers or innovative academic departments. It will not impact more than 25-40 percent of the teaching faculty, in my experience of promoting faculty development at nine different higher education institutions over 20 years. It will have very limited positive impact on teaching in the classroom, student retention, and institutional attractiveness and reputation.

*If the fundamentals for success are put into place and practiced consistently, then the faculty development program will be successful both in terms of institutional impact and faculty career satisfaction.*

Parker Palmer's book *Courage to Teach* should be required reading along with Fink's integrated course design. Palmer addresses clearly and convincingly the importance of individual faculty integrity to the teaching-learning process as being rooted in the integration of subject matter, student characteristics, and the faculty member's core identity as an educator. All three of these aspects must be visible and practiced in a widely appealing and engaging faculty development program.

Faculty development must be viewed as a diffusion process. If the fundamentals for success are put into place and practiced consistently, then the faculty development program will be successful both in terms of institutional impact and faculty career satisfaction. Building that diffusion effort systematically requires certain identified practices. These practices include a program that covers annually the wide-ranging interests of faculty that include teaching best practices, research time releases, team-teaching opportunities, faculty seminars and luncheons to share experiences led by colleagues, and annual visits by outside leaders in innovation in higher education. Program mix is a crucial element of successful faculty development programs.

Diffusion also depends on the annual or semiannual required faculty development days tied to an institution's mission. These days highlight current faculty creativity and innovation across all disciplines in the institution. They are an important time of bonding the institutional commitment to faculty development.

Finally, an effective and successful faculty development program depends on each individual department promoting disciplinary and teaching innovations relevant to their courses, students, and disciplines to reinforce the overall institutional program.

Faculty development programs can easily achieve 25-40 percent faculty involvement and participation. But only programs that are structured from recruitment to post-tenure review will deliver a comprehensive institutional mission benefit for all faculty and the students they serve.

*Henry W. Smorynski is a Midland University leadership fellow.*

# Optimizing Performance: Three Essentials for Success

*R. Kent Crookston, PhD*

In a recent national survey, nearly 3,000 American academic leaders identified problem behavior of employees as their top concern.[1] Lackluster performance was the most common problem; bullying and being passive aggressive were less common but most troubling. Most of us have worked with a person whose conduct disrupts or interferes with the performance and productivity of others, sometimes the entire department. Confronting a problem performer with confidence, and optimizing their performance, is essential to the health of your department.

My colleague David Whetten, a professor of organizational behavior, spent 40 years at two universities, and consulted with numerous business organizations, researching factors that influence behavior and performance. David developed what he calls a "performance equation." He has given me permission to share his equation and to discuss its application.

## Performance = Expectations x Ability x Motivation[2]

This equation asserts that a person's optimal performance is dependent on their knowing what is expected of them and whether they are able and motivated to deliver. Note the mathematical construction of the equation which makes all elements indispensable. If any one component is zero, productivity is zero. In my years of interacting with academic leaders I have found Dave's equation to be a very straightforward and effective way to diagnose the root of poor performance, and a very helpful reference when interacting with the poor performer.

## Expectations

"Expectations are the deal breaker," Whetten says. "If there is ambiguity around expectations, people will undergo performance stress of the worst kind." Unless performance standards and measures have been clarified and agreed upon, having a meeting to discuss unacceptable performance can be awkward and stressful for both the supervisor and the employee.

It is most helpful when all members of a department have taken time to identify what guides and inspires them, as well as the productivity and etiquette they expect of one another. These expectations should be approved by the entire unit, and revisited frequently. It is then relatively easy for an administrator to confront an individual's performance that is deviant, and ask him or her to discuss the gap between their behavior and the unit's well-known norms. It is of course appropriate to consider what is specifically expected of each person in their unique role within the unit, and whether there is any reason the basic standards might not apply to them, or might need to be customized for their situation.

[1] Crookston, R. Kent. 2010. Results from a national survey: the help chairs want most. The Department Chair, Vol. 21, No. 1 (p. 13-15)
[2] The equation is from David A. Whetten, personal communication, July, 2012. It is a compilation of the thinking of several scholars. A good discussion of the background behind the equation is found in: David A. Whetten and Kim S. Cameron. (2016). Developing Management Skills. 9th edition. Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc. (p. 263-289)

## Ability

Once expectations have been clarified, it is important to determine whether the individual has the essential skills and wherewithal to do their job. A common error is for a supervisor to confuse ability with motivation. With technological innovations in high-turnover fields of knowledge—including frequently updated systems to access that knowledge—it is becoming increasingly common for older, and even mid-career professionals to find themselves discouragingly behind and feeling obsolete in their own specialty. Obsolescence is of course embarrassing, and an employee may feel, and even portray, a lack of motivation rather than disclose their inadequacy. With care, a supervisor can usually find a way to determine whether an employee has the necessary knowledge and capacity to meet expectations. If some form of updating or renewal can be arranged, or if additional resources can be provided, there must be an understanding that expectations will be reevaluated once any such help has been provided.

## Motivation

When supervisors in any organization are asked which of the three equation components account for poor performance, the reply is usually "lack of motivation." Whetten and I have found however that lack of motivation is rarely the primary cause of performance failures. Only after expectations and ability have been carefully considered, and all misunderstandings around these two components removed, should a leader turn to asking, "Is your heart really in this?"

Leaders must be careful when trying to evaluate another person's motivation. Motivation is sort of a black box in a person's makeup, and misdiagnosis is common. As pointed out under ability, a person may fake lack of motivation to cover a lack of ability. That said, by deploying consequences a supervisor can influence a colleague's motivation considerably. Patterson and colleagues point out:

*Consequences motivate.* Motivation isn't something you do to someone. People already want to do things. They're motivated by the consequences they anticipate. And since any action leads to a variety of consequences, people act on the basis of the overall consequences bundle."[3]

Consequences are so important in fact that Whetten's performance equation could be rewritten as:

## Performance = Expectations x Ability x Motivation Consequences

A leader must be consistent in the application of consequences; inconsistency can create serious problems—whether a person's performance is stellar or problematic. When there are no consequences for substandard performance the employee will assume that no one is watching, and poor behavior can be expected to persist and even become worse. On the other hand, if positive performance is not recognized, a top performer might become discouraged and no longer be motivated to continue striving. Effective consequences are more than just talk; they are based on action—a reward given or a privilege lost.

Tina Gunsalus has a surprising recommendation when it comes to imposing consequences. She suggests that supervisors read a book on dog training, and points out that just as with dogs, consistency with people is essential—one should always reward good behavior, and never reward bad behavior.[4]

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[3] K. Patterson, J. Grenny, R. McMillan, A. Switzler, and D. Maxfield. – 2nd edition. (2013). Crucial accountability: tools for resolving violated expectations, broken commitments, and bad behavior. New York: McGraw Hill. (p. 134)

[4] Gunsalus, C. K. (2006). The College Administrator's Survival Guide. Cambridge, MA: Harvard U. (p. 71), plus personal communication, April 4, 2008.

## Confronting with Confidence

Although they are not fun, confrontations comprise the core of accountability. Here are some tips:

1. Never wink at or ignore violations of expectations or protocol.
2. Start by evaluating yourself and the situation. How much is your own prejudice and lack of diligence to blame?
3. Allow people to save face; visit in private. Ask them to share their perspective about the gap between their performance and what is expected; then let them talk while you listen.
4. Be patient. If someone has been performing poorly for a long time, don’t expect them to reform overnight.

*Kent Crookston is associate director of the Faculty Center at Brigham Young University.*

# Enhancing a Valuable Asset: Positives of Thoughtful Staff Management

*Jane Williams, PhD, and N. Douglas Lees, PhD*

Formal reports and general discussions within the academy about department or school productivity focus almost exclusively on the work of the faculty. This accounts for the attention now being paid to the chairs' evaluations of faculty that target strategies designed to maintain high performance and, in some cases, to drive improvement. While it is difficult to argue that this approach is inappropriate, ask almost any chair how their department would fare without the support provided by their staff, and they will admit that virtually every aspect of the operation would be negatively impacted if they had less talented and motivated staff. Yet, in many departments, staff are not regularly evaluated at a depth comparable to faculty, if at all, and are rarely the recipients of opportunities to enhance and expand their skills.

Our different colleges have differing faculty-to-staff ratios and staff with varying levels of expertise. For example, a small undergraduate-only college may have departments with a faculty-to-staff ratio of 10-to-1 or higher. In some instances, a single staff member may be shared by two small departments. In both cases, the individual must perform multiple tasks including placing orders through purchasing, appointing adjuncts, filing travel reimbursements, fielding phone calls, greeting visitors, setting appointments, and so on. In larger institutions where research and graduate programming are prominent, faculty-to-staff ratios can be 1-to-1 or lower. The tasks at the small institution done by a single person are now accomplished by several individuals. In addition, there are graduate and undergraduate advisors; graduate admissions personnel; preaward and postaward grant personnel; development officers; IT personnel; outreach coordinators; and specialized technical help in science and engineering fields to maintain instrumentation, prep teaching labs, operate facilities such as animal rooms, core labs, greenhouses, fabrication labs, and collections; plus some more exotic staff such as instructional design experts, glass blowers, and carpenters. It is not difficult to imagine the chaos, productivity losses, and frustration that would take place if any one of most of these functions were done poorly.

Let us now return to the notion of staff evaluation (or management) in the context of the large, complex research university. Clearly, the chair could not and should not attempt to evaluate all the staff. In cases where there is a hierarchy of function among clusters of staff (e.g., a senior or chief accountant and several junior accountants), those at the higher end would evaluate the others. In other cases, faculty would perform this function. For example, the director of undergraduate studies would evaluate the undergraduate advisors while the director of graduate programs would evaluate the graduate advisors and those who work in the graduate admissions office. Delegation can work in these cases, but true equity in the process is achieved only when the evaluators develop comparable criteria, use the same evaluative language, and meet as a group to discuss the particulars of each case. Finally, there is the issue of chairs and their delegates in reviewing the work of those with high school diplomas to PhDs and in widely varying and non-disciplinary fields. For example, the chair of chemistry evaluates faculty on teaching, research, and service—but how does he or she formatively evaluate someone with an MBA (the senior accountant) and IT staff, all of whom have far more expertise in their areas than the chair? Perhaps this is one reason why in-depth reviews of staff performance are often "forgotten."

The overall goals of effective staff performance management include gathering data for promotion consideration and for merit pay. However, these administrative goals are overshadowed in importance by goals that are developmental and promote relationship building. Chairs and other supervisors will have the opportunity to provide feedback that reinforces, guides, and motivates future behavior. Development can be further enhanced by support for additional training or encouragement for new activities. By demonstrating genuine commitment in ensuring that individual staff have the opportunity for personal and professional growth through these developmental efforts, the supervisor can energize the staff member and establish long-term loyalty. Finally, regular face-to-face communication on job performance can contribute to building a high-trust relationship.

Effective performance management can lead to personal development and improvement in performance. It provides the opportunity to identify changes needed in the job description. It may also lead to identifying and acknowledging staff contributions that were previously overlooked, allowing the supervisor to identify individual aspirations and perhaps discover new talents from which the department may benefit. In situations where resources are scarce, it is an opportunity to express appreciation and provide recognition for the important work that the staff contribute to the mission of the department.

There are several criteria one could use to assess the effectiveness of the assessment process. Certainly, accurate assessment of performance is critical for effective performance management. Another important outcome of the process is the use of feedback to improve performance and develop employees. Even if the feedback generated is accurate, the process itself cannot be deemed successful if feedback is not accepted and applied to behavior. Thus, an often-overlooked criterion for appraisal process success is appraisal reactions—namely perceptions of fairness and satisfaction. Research suggests that if employees believe that the process was fairly conducted, and they are satisfied with it, they are more likely to heed the feedback and use it to adjust or enhance behavior. The five-step process outlined below provides suggestions for a process that will generate positive reactions from staff.

*Every aspect of the [department] would be negatively impacted if there were less talented and motivated staff.*

Rather than a single event, chairs and other supervisors are encouraged to think of this as an ongoing process. This process best occurs when both parties are active and take responsibility in each step of the performance management cycle. Each step describes a specific event or set of behaviors that should occur; however, an assumption of this model is that each party shares performance feedback throughout the process. Although the final step is a formal summary of performance over the year, feedback should be provided to employees continuously throughout the year.

The first step is to clearly establish the job responsibilities; this requires that both parties share information, ask questions, and seek clarity at the beginning of the performance cycle and throughout the year. In the second step, both parties need to calibrate and establish a common frame of reference for the behavioral expectations that underlie the job responsibilities. For instance, the department's fiscal officer might have budget reports as one job responsibility. It is the supervisor's responsibility to express behaviorally what it means to meet expectations for that duty. The behavioral expectation may include a statement of frequency of delivered reports (i.e., quarterly reports) and include a statement about the quality/accuracy of the reports (i.e., reports are generated with few if any mistakes). Developing criteria and standards that are clearly understood will allow individuals to more effectively self-regulate behavior to meet those goals.

The third step in the cycle is to monitor and collect performance indicators. Both parties are responsible for routinely assessing performance against the goals and cataloguing examples of success and/or failure to meet goals. This is especially important for staff positions where the outcomes of the work are not readily seen by the supervisor (e.g., number of IT issues addressed by an IT team). In these situations, we encourage supervisors to collect performance feedback or evidence from others that staff members may work with. For instance, your fiscal officer may work directly with a campus office that may be able to provide meaningful feedback about the staff member's performance. The point here is that a fuller conversation about performance over the year can only happen if the supervisor has evidence of behavior across the year.

The fourth step is to evaluate performance prior to the interview. It is recommended that both the supervisor and the employee individually complete a performance assessment form. This encourages the employees to spend time thinking about their performance and preparing for the interview. It also provides the employee the opportunity to have some voice in the process. Research strongly supports the importance of voice for ensuring perceptions of procedural justice and fair treatment. Finally, if the supervisor see the self-assessment before the interview, they can pre-identify areas of agreement or disagreement.

The final step is the interview, which often generates anxiety for both parties. However, if the steps above have been followed, and both parties have actively communicated throughout the year, the anxiety should be mitigated to a great degree. However, supervisors should consider these suggestions before the meeting:

- Both supervisors and staff should prepare for and formulate their goals for the meeting.
- The supervisor should ensure that there is ample, uninterrupted time for the meeting.
- Start with the self-assessment. Through active listening, the chair/supervisor may gain information that could adjust perceptions and create avenues for follow-up questions.
- Make sure that feedback focuses on specific examples and behaviors. Using generalities or focusing on personal characteristics is counterproductive and raises defensiveness.
- The supervisor should be prepared to offer developmental support for high-performing staff as well as appropriate support for those needing improvement.
- It is important that the supervisor maintain emotional equilibrium.

Staff in our academic departments are professionals, and treating them as such, including providing them with thorough, fair performance reviews along with help in improving or expanding skills, can boost morale, and may enhance department productivity.

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# How to: Developing a New Faculty Evaluation System

*Lisa M. Griffin, EdD*

At Georgia College & State University, each academic unit was tasked with developing a new faculty evaluation system. We were instructed to create an instrument that had both qualitative and quantitative components. The plan we developed was put in place in 2012.

As an academic unit (School of Health & Human Performance) within a college (Health Sciences), our college-level tenure and promotion document had already defined the evaluation categories (teaching, scholarship, service) for tenure-track faculty, and we felt it was in everyone's best interest to maintain consistency and use the same definitions. For lecturers/instructors, our academic unit decided these evaluations would focus on teaching only (as this is university policy) and that teaching would be defined in the same way.

Our next task was to decide what we wanted this instrument to look like (rubric, checklist, narrative, etc.). We decided on rubrics that used a rating system and a narrative component (see Figure 1 for a modified scholarship rubric).

Figure 1

**SCHOLARSHIP RUBRIC**

**E = Excellent = 4; G = Good = 3; NI = Needs Improvement = 2; P = Poor = 1**

| Scholarship Categories | COHS T&P Critical Element Equivalent | Identification of Faculty Activities | Evidence of These Activities | Evaluation of Weighted Role |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Professional Research** | Development and dissemination of knowledge through any of Boyer's four forms of scholarship. Knowledge may take the form of empirical, historical, basic, applied, conceptual, theoretical, or philosophical scholarship. | Peer-reviewed work such as:<br>• Authored or edited books<br>• Book chapters<br>• Journal articles<br>• Monographs<br><br>Reviewed or invited presentations such as:<br>• Invited keynotes<br>• Posters at professional conferences<br>• Public lectures<br><br>Grants for research projects<br><br>Authoring/producing creative works<br><br>Scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) | Copies of work or written verification of acceptance of work for publication<br><br>Copy of program, copy of conference literature<br><br>Written documentation of grant submission and/or award, plus copy of grant<br><br>Assessment of SoTL activities; developing and testing instructional materials; advancing learning theories through classroom research | E<br><br>G<br><br>NI<br><br>P |
| Narrative: | | | | |

It took a year of discussion, compromise, and eventual consensus, but we finally moved forward with a test run. After three years of using this evaluation instrument, it has been tweaked somewhat but has worked tremendously well. What follows is the process and product that came from our journey to develop a systematic evaluation instrument that would enable us to determine to what degree faculty performance aligned with the values of the academic unit.

## First step of the process

Using the Yearly Faculty Evaluation Percentage Table (Figure 2), faculty members fill in a percentage for each category (excluding the administration category unless the faculty member is a program coordinator) based upon their projections of what they would like to accomplish professionally during the calendar year (January 1–December 31). These are typically submitted at the beginning of the spring semester (January). Faculty are given an opportunity to reexamine their percentage choices in August—in case they feel modifications need to be made (these need director/chair approval).

Figure 2

**Yearly Faculty Evaluation Percentage Table**
(Faculty Choice)

January 1–December 31

Faculty Name:

| | | Your Decision |
|---|---|---|
| Teaching | 50% | ____50%____ |
| Scholarship | 20-40% | ____20%____ |
| Service* | 20-40% | ____20%____ |
| Administration* | 5-10% | ____10%____ |
| Total | | 100% |

**1. Each category (teaching, scholarship, service) must have a value (in multiples of five) within the provided ranges.**
**2. Teaching must be a minimum of 50 percent.**
**3. All values added together should total a sum of 100 percent.**
***Administration value is a percentage of the overall service category.**

## Second step of the process

Throughout the year, faculty write narratives in the spaces provided on each rubric in an effort to keep their materials updated. When it is time for faculty to prepare their documentation for submission, they must also complete the Individual Faculty Report (IFR) Faculty & Director Evaluation (see Figure 3, 2nd column, for teaching example). Each faculty member decides what weighting (%) he or she wants to assign in each category within the teaching, scholarship, and service areas.

Figure 3

**IFR Faculty & Director Evaluation**
**Example**

**Teaching**

| Categories | Weight (%) **Faculty** | Evaluation Score (1-4) **Chair** | Composite (Chosen % x Evaluation Score) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Content Delivery | 25 | | |
| Course Design | 25 | | |
| Course Expertise | 25 | | |
| Course Management | 25 | | |
| Total | 100% | | |

**Choose your percentage in each category. No category can be lower than 10 percent. Each category must have a percentage. Percentages can be only in multiples of five (10 percent, 15 percent, 20 percent, 25 percent, etc.).**

The completed rubrics (narrative for each area), the IFR Faculty & Director Evaluation Form (Figure 3, 2nd column), a Word document copy of the faculty member's most recent vita, and the Yearly Faculty Evaluation Percentage Table comprises the faculty evaluation packet that is submitted to the director/chair.

## Third step of the process

Using the faculty member's vita and information provided on each rubric, the director/chair evaluates all the documentation and assigns an Evaluation Score (see Figure 3, 3rd column) in each category of each area (teaching, scholarship, service). It is a sliding numerical score (1-4) that corresponds to the evaluation classification (poor/needs improvement/good/excellent) from across the top of each rubric (refer to Figure 1).

The Composite Score (Figure 4, 4th column) for each category is calculated by taking the faculty member's percentage and multiplying it by the director/chair's evaluation score. The Total Composite Score (bottom row) for each area (teaching, scholarship, service) is derived from summing each composite score in that area.

Figure 4

**Individual Faculty Report (IFR) Faculty & Director Evaluation**

**Teaching**

| Categories | Weight (%) **Faculty** | Evaluation Score (1-4) **Chair** | Composite Score (Chosen % x Evaluation Score) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Content Delivery | 25 | 3.0 | .75 |
| Course Design | 25 | 3.0 | .75 |
| Course Expertise | 25 | 4.0 | 1.0 |
| Course Management | 25 | 4.0 | 1.0 |
| Total | 100% | | 3.5 |

**Scholarship**

| Categories | Weight (%) **Faculty** | Evaluation Score (1-4) **Chair** | Composite Score (Chosen % x Evaluation Score) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Professional Research | 40 | 2.0 | .80 |
| Professionalism in Academic Field | 60 | 3.0 | 1.8 |
| Total | 100% | | 2.6 |

**Service**

| Categories | Weight (%) Faculty | Evaluation Score (1-4) Chair | Composite Score (Chosen % x Evaluation Score) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Institutional or USG Service | 30 | 4.0 | 1.2 |
| Professional Service | 10 | 4.0 | .40 |
| Community Service | 60 | 4.0 | 2.4 |
| Total | 100% | | 4.0 |

**Choose your percentage in each category. No category can be lower than 10 percent. Each category must have a percentage. Percentages can be only in multiples of five (10 percent, 15 percent, 20 percent, 25 percent, etc.). Each category (teaching, scholarship, service) should total 100 percent.**

These three total composite scores get transposed onto the Yearly Faculty Evaluation Percentage Table (see Figure 5) and multiplied by the percentage chosen at the beginning of the year. This provides us with a Total column. The overall quantitative/numeric score is derived from adding these rows for an Overall Total Composite Score.

Figure 5

**Overall/Total Composite**

| Category | Role | % of Time (Yearly Faculty % Table) | Composite Score/Each Category | Totals |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Teaching (not less than 50%) | ✓ | 50 | 3.5 | 1.75 |
| Scholarship | ✓ | 20 | 2.6 | .52 |
| Service* | ✓ | 20 | 4.0 | 1.2 |
| Administration* | | 10 | | |
| Total Composite Score | | 100% | | 3.47 |

*Coordinator role a component of the service category.

**Chair Narrative**
**Teaching:**

**Scholarship:**

**Service:**

# Fourth step of the process

This information provides the director/chair with a final quantitative evaluation determination (3.47 from the previous example). The director/chair also writes a summative narrative and includes that with the final evaluation (refer to Figure 5). Each faculty member receives an electronic copy of his or her respective evaluation prior to setting up a one-on-one meeting with the director/chair. This process has allowed us to provide both quantitative and qualitative feedback to faculty that has helped deliver better clarity for tenure, promotion, and merit pay decisions.

As a positive side note, our institution has recently brought back merit pay. This instrument has been extremely helpful with simplifying that process as well. There are no "across the board" merit raises, so this evaluation system has enabled the director/chair to use the quantitative component as a means of developing merit pay guidelines.

- The Total Composite Score from each of the faculty evaluations serves as the "merit ranking" for any particular year.
- Employees are ranked and then grouped into four "performance levels" (Exceptional; Commendable; Competent; Not Eligible for Merit).
- Based upon any year's merit pay allocations, the spread of evaluation performance, and the number of employees that year, the following depicts an example of the merit pay determination as generated from the yearly faculty evaluation process:

| IFR Total Composite Score | Merit Categories | Merit Ranges |
|---|---|---|
| 3.8-4.0 | Exceptional | 3.95-4.0% |
| 3.3-3.79 | Commendable | 3.3-3.94% |
| 3.0-3.29 | Competent | 2.0-3.29% |
| 1.0-2.99 | Not Eligible for Merit | |

I have found this approach to be fair and as equitable as humanly possible when I am evaluating someone else's performance. Faculty do not always like the work that goes into it, but they realize that the more specific they are with their materials, the better they are able to represent themselves professionally—and that is advantageous for the tenure and promotion process. We will continue to examine this process each year to make sure it is still working for us and, if not, make changes that will better reflect our evolution as an academic unit.

*Lisa M. Griffin is director of the School of Health and Human Performance at Georgia College & State University.*

# A New Classroom Observation Tool

*Maryellen Weimer, PhD*

We need better data describing what's happening in classrooms. Faculty's and students' descriptions aren't always that accurate. End-of-course rating data is highly judgmental. Classroom observation by outsiders happens irregularly, is generally evaluative, and is often colored by the observer's perspectives. The data collected in an individual classroom is usually confidential and almost never aggregated. Given all this, what goes on in a collection of classrooms—say, those in a department or even across an institution—is pretty much a matter of speculation. Are faculty using as much active learning as they say they are? Are students taking notes, or are they texting during class?

The absence of accurate data about classroom activities is complicated by the prevailing culture. There is a tendency within the academy to think that classrooms are very private places. Professors have the freedom to teach in the ways they prefer. Outside observers are not always welcome. Most faculty are vested in their teaching style, and many become defensive if they think data collection is about documenting the need to change.

> *The absence of accurate data about classroom activities is complicated by the prevailing culture.*

A recently developed classroom observation instrument (Classroom Observation Protocol for Undergraduate STEM, or COPUS), created for use in science courses but applicable elsewhere, has the potential to help with the various problems and issues associated with collecting accurate data on classroom activities. It documents classroom behaviors—those concrete actions taken by the teacher and by the students. In two-minute intervals, what the teacher is doing and what the students are doing are coded as one or more of 25 possible actions—all of which are described in neutral terms. For example, the students are listening to the instructor/taking notes, discussing clicker questions in groups of two or more, taking a quiz or test, or answering a question posed by the instructor. And the teacher is lecturing; listening to and answering student questions; showing or conducting a demonstration, experiment, simulation, video, or animation; or waiting or observing as students complete work. (All 25 of these classroom activities are listed in the article referenced below.)

The neutral language makes it easier to share results with the instructor. Teachers are less likely to become defensive about concrete observations such as "administration (assign homework, return tests)" than they are about results that are more abstract and judgmental, such as "made good use of class time." The presence or absence of concrete behaviors is easier for observers to accurately record as well.

Developers of this instrument were concerned, however, about the accuracy and reliability of the observation. If two observers looked at the same class, would their recorded data be the same? This has been an issue with other observation instruments. They weren't reliable and could only be made so after many hours of training and observations. One of the goals of this instrument was to enable a high level of inter-rater reliability with minimal training. The article describes how the instrument designers achieved that by simplifying the instrument and then using a carefully designed hour-and-a-half training session.

An instrument like this can be used to generate data for a number of different uses, starting with feedback for individual faculty members: "We discovered that faculty members often did not have a good sense of how much time they spent on different activities during class, and found COPUS data helpful" (p. 626). The data presented via simple pie charts is nonthreatening and very informative. It also adds objectivity to the more general and subjective data produced by student ratings and comments.

Data from the instrument can also be aggregated across a department or program. The research team describes how they did this for one cohort of science classes, sharing the collective results with a teaching and learning center, thereby enabling the center to develop targeted programming. In this case, a fairly high percentage of faculty in the cohort were using clicker questions, but they were not having students discuss their answers—which, research has indicated, promotes development of problem-solving skills.

Data collected for a department, for a program, or even across an institution helps both faculty and academic leaders develop a clear and accurate understanding of the activities that are occurring in classrooms. And data collection via an instrument like this can be an efficient and much less threatening process.

Reference: Smith, M.K., Jones, F.H.M., Gilbert, S.L., and Wieman, C.E. (2013). The classroom observation protocol for undergraduate STEM (COPUS): A new instrument to characterize university STEM classroom practices. *Cell Biology Education—Life Sciences Education, 12* (Winter), 618-627

*Maryellen Weimer is the editor of* The Teaching Professor.

# Is It Worth Revisiting Faculty Evaluation?

*N. Douglas Lees, PhD*

Faculty evaluation is a very old subject that never seems to go away. New volumes on the subject continue to appear and articles are found with regularity in periodicals for university administrators. In addition, conferences for chairs usually have a number of sessions on this topic on the agenda. The books would not be published, the articles would neither be written nor accepted, and the conference sessions would not be held unless they were purchased, read, or heavily attended, respectively. Thus, there is a continuing appetite for information on this topic.

A recent national survey of department chairs (Cipriano, R. E. and Riccardi R. L., *The Department Chair*, 25(2), 3-4, 2014) identified evaluating faculty as the number one essential skill for chairs. At the same time, conducting annual faculty evaluations shows up high on the list of unpleasant chair tasks. One might conclude that the answer to the title question is "yes."

A new level of attention on issues concerned with faculty evaluation emerged about 15 to 20 years ago. A major factor in this new emphasis is the accountability movement in higher education, in which institutions have to demonstrate their value and effectiveness, and faculty must justify holding tenured positions by ensuring continued productivity and teaching success. This has culminated in many institutions requiring substantive post-tenure reviews of all faculty as a way of avoiding the threat of legislatures to eliminate tenure altogether.

In this case, "substantive" means a thorough review, one with the consequence of dismissal if unsatisfactory performance is not addressed within a defined period of time. To place this in an extreme context, imagine this change for an associate professor who is new to the chair position and who must evaluate, for the first time in two decades, a senior, full professor who has been performing poorly for years without consequence. This chair would almost certainly feel the need for advice.

A second factor impacting the faculty evaluation came into play with the elimination of mandatory retirement. While this is not always a negative (many of our senior colleagues still function at high levels), it can be a problem when some of these faculty are no longer competitive for funding, struggle with technology, or do not connect with today's students due to generational differences.

The frequency of faculty staying on has been exacerbated by economic factors and by the rapidly rising cost of health care. Faculty caught in these situations are often disappointed that they must stay when they had hoped to be elsewhere. Chairs facing reviews of this population are challenged on one hand to evaluate on the local standards of productivity, while on the other having the responsibility for helping these faculty through referrals to campus resources, modified assignments, special assistance, and personal wisdom.

## The process, step by step

Assuming that there is an annual faculty evaluation process, where does the new chair begin in preparing for the process? This is an especially critical question if the chair is an external hire and is, thus, someone who has never been through the local process.

A recommended first step is the establishment (or review), with the collaboration of the faculty, of a set of measures and standards for performance in the areas of faculty responsibility (teaching research/scholarship, service, and others, in accord with institutional tradition). The list of items should have both quantitative and qualitative components (how many? how well?) and be as varied as feasible.

Having multiple measures allows for individual faculty activities, strengths, and interests. Elements of the list can be aspirational in the sense that they are an attempt to develop new behaviors, and placing them on the list sends the message that they matter (or will) "count." Collaboratively defining the evidences to be used in the process of faculty evaluation is an important step because it brings clarity and a sense of ownership to the faculty.

Following from step one, the chair must collect data on the established measures. Much of this should come from the faculty member's written or electronic annual report. Additional information (e.g., surveys, evaluations done by peers and students, grant activity) may be provided by others.

Once the chair has all the information and has reviewed the previous year's evaluation with special emphasis on goals for achievement or, in some cases, for improvement, the next step is to schedule face-to-face meetings with each faculty member. The recommendation to meet with the faculty is based on the experience that much is revealed during the conversation.

*Conducting annual faculty evaluations shows up high on the list of unpleasant chair tasks.*

The one-on-one meeting has importance beyond confirming and updating the data input. It provides the chair with the opportunity to give feedback to all. In some cases, it can be as simple as saying things like "your performance across all areas of responsibility has been stellar," or "you have met or exceeded all of your ambitious goals set last year." Earned accolades have a positive impact on future performance. The chair should be attentive to opportunities to provide formative feedback to help even high-performing faculty meet their goals. Adding a statement to the comments above, such as "I will provide resources for a visit from your new collaborator in order to facilitate the development of your joint proposal," might be an appropriate way to pledge support.

Some of the faculty, hopefully only a few, will be found to be in need of improvement. While this could be one of those difficult conversations, the chair should make the case based on the evidence and listen carefully to the response. In those cases where there is denial of responsibility, the chair must be firm in setting the expectation that improvement be made. To demonstrate support to effect the changes necessary and for the efforts of the faculty member, the chair should be prepared to offer or direct the faculty member to appropriate assistance.

In both the case of outstanding faculty performance and that of needed improvement, the chair should be prepared to offer support that will facilitate further growth or change the trajectory, respectively. This mandates that chairs become familiar with campus resources and what they have to offer (e.g., Center for Teaching Excellence, Research Office for grant writing) and that they develop a cadre of faculty who can serve as mentors/consultants or as connections to others across campus and perhaps beyond. In those cases where concrete resources are required (e.g., for travel, a student assistant, released time, an instrument), department budgets may be tapped or appeals made to the dean, with the latter prearranged where possible.

A final element of the meeting is to set goals for the coming year. This exercise serves the purposes of helping faculty structure their work, demonstrating chair interest in and commitment to success, and, in cases where performance is lagging, setting expectations for improvement. It also gives the chair a starting point for reviewing faculty accomplishments in the next review cycle.

Now it is time to author or revise the written review. This should follow from the conversation, with all evaluative remarks supported by evidence from the collected materials. This is another opportunity for praising excellence, pledging support, and setting the bar for improvement. Many colleges and universities use specific language to describe the level of faculty performance; the recommendation is that chairs use this language to avoid ambiguity. Revisions to correct errors of fact are acceptable, but chairs should take care to avoid negotiating language that diminishes the rightful impact of the evaluation. The final acts of the process are both parties signing off on the final document and submission by the chair.

What has been presented here is a skeletal structure with several recommendations for chairs who are new to or uncomfortable with conducting faculty evaluations. The final recommendation is that they review the literature on faculty career stages and on facilitating faculty career path changes for additional insights on maintaining faculty vitality.

*N. Douglas Lees is associate dean for planning and finance, professor, and former chair of biology at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis.*

# Does Online Faculty Development Really Matter?

*Jennifer Patterson Lorenzetti, MS*

Laurence Boggess has had an interesting career path to his current position as the director of faculty development for the Penn State World Campus. After 25 years as a K–12 administrator, he earned his PhD at Penn State and continued on to take a faculty position in the department of educational leadership at Miami University. He moved to the college of education at Penn State before taking his current position as director. Along the way, he has formed his own opinions about the importance of online faculty development and whether it really matters.

## Does it matter?

Boggess poses this question, then allows that "the follow-up question is, 'to whom?'" He explains that this question is a natural outgrowth of the understandable uncertainty that accompanies these sorts of training endeavors. "We always wonder, 'is what I'm doing making a difference?'" he says. "Does it matter to the faculty and administration?"

Part of the question is how the success of a faculty development program will be measured. "What are the metrics we're going to use to measure student success? You can't draw a straight line from faculty [development] to student success; there are too many other factors," Boggess says. However, the question remains: "How can we convince the administration to [fund the program] and faculty to come take our courses? What are the metrics that are meaningful?" While he understands that many people aren't thinking of this ROI perspective on faculty development, he says that, in the current climate, "they will be."

Boggess explains the problem like this: "Increasingly, universities are suggesting or requiring some credential—a course or a series of a courses or modules—to 'prepare' or 'qualify' faculty to teach online. However, there is a tenuous research thread, at best, associating faculty training and student learning. Given the inability of educational research to establish credible measures of causality, faculty developers and faculty development researchers commonly look to proxy measures of effectiveness…."

Instead of these proxy measures, Boggess proposes the collection of data that more closely measures the success of online faculty development.

Higher education will be looking at metrics to measure the success of online faculty development initiatives because online learning has matured in the higher education environment. "Nationally, we've accepted that online learning is here to stay," he says. Therefore, the notion of having intentional faculty development has also matured.

## Success at the World Campus

Penn State World Campus offers a nationally-recognized series of courses for its online faculty. The initial course, OL 1000: Welcome to World Campus, is followed by courses on teaching the adult learner, teaching the military learner, accessibility online, and using the LMS. All of these courses are self-paced. Additional instructor-led, cohort courses are also available.

The core course, OL 2000: Effective Online Instruction, makes up part of the online teaching certificate that instructors can earn. This four-week, instructor-led, cohort class teaches competencies in pedagogy, management, and technology. To date, nearly 1,400 individuals have taken the course, including faculty, instructional designers, staff, administrators, and graduate students. Completion of this certificate demonstrates that "faculty have taken their interest in online teaching seriously," Boggess says.

To demonstrate the effectiveness of this course, Penn State undertook a study of faculty self-reports in the course evaluation of OL 2000. The study sought to show how faculty experienced the course and their assessment of its outcomes. This study was conducted via a quantitative analysis of the faculty responses on the written portion of the course evaluation. More than 250 individual faculty members contributed written responses that could be included in the study, which covered 22 sections of the class from 2012-2015.

Three major findings resulted. In a recent Online Learning Consortium conference presentation, Boggess summarized these findings as follows:

- A significant majority had positive experiences.
- Their pre-course concerns were affective and technical.
- Their post-course reflections highlighted relief expressed as increased comfort, competence, and confidence.

In other words, the course made the majority of faculty feel much better about their ability to teach online.

*Faculty development is assumed to be good, [but that thinking's] probably not enough anymore.*

Many faculty members went into the course with significant anxiety, signaled by words like "unprepared," "incompetent," "inexperienced," "uncomfortable," and even "lonely." However, when asked to describe their feelings post-course, the words used signaled a sense of relief: "surprised," "comfortable," "confident," and "competent" were all used.

The new level of comfort seems to have been brought about by certain faculty discoveries that helped them feel better prepared.

Boggess explains that the faculty discovered, among other things:

- Resources they didn't know existed
- Colleagues of mix[ed] experience
- Techniques for engagement
- Techniques for student motivation
- Strategies for personalizing a course
- Strategies for time management

Although there were no hard data connecting the completion of the course with student success, the results of the course were quite clear. "Faculty come [to the course] with an overwhelming feeling of

apprehension that translates to a feeling of relief," Boggess says. "I think that's a good finding to share with administration," he says, explaining that this information can have a great deal of power when disseminated throughout the university. Faculty tell other faculty that they needed to do the training," he says.

The value of the online faculty training has indeed spread through the university. The institution has undertaken a pilot program for graduate students that allows these new instructors to learn some of the skills they will need in the classroom, and the response has been tremendous. "We combined a couple of courses [and] use the badge system to micro credential it," he says. The institution expected about 30 graduate students to sign up for the training, and some 350 did so. To date, about 280 have completed the training. "A strong motive was [that they] wanted to have some credential on their CV," he noted. This indicates a desire to demonstrate the commitment to online teaching also seen among the non-student faculty. "We want to start following them longitudinally," Boggess says. However, at this time, the graduate student training is open online to Penn State graduate students, with discussions still ongoing about whether this training could be opened to graduate students across the country.

When asked about his advice for other institutions thinking about a Penn State-style online faculty development program, Boggess urges his peers to think about things in terms of impact. "If you're not thinking about metrics, you should be," he says.

"Faculty development is assumed to be good, [but that thinking's] probably not enough anymore." Instead, institutions should take charge of their online faculty development and how it is perceived by faculty, administration, and other constituents.

"We're in control of the message at this point," Boggess says.

Whether institutions like Penn State can keep in control requires forward thinking and a desire to demonstrate the effectiveness of training.

*Jennifer Patterson Lorenzetti is managing editor of* Academic Leader *and the chair of the 2017 Leadership in Higher Education Conference. She is a writer, speaker, higher education consultant, and the owner of Hilltop Communications.*

# Preparing and Using Classroom Observations in Faculty Teaching Evaluations

*Peggy Thelen, PhD*

Evaluation of faculty teaching plays an important role in the success of the individual faculty member, the department, and, most importantly, student learning. And yet, many department leaders have had no formal training in observing and evaluating teaching. As the education world becomes increasingly evidence driven, it is more crucial than ever to create appropriate and consistent faculty teaching observation models. It seems most prudent to use an evaluation process as a means to improve teaching, which, in turn, should improve learning. Teaching observation and evaluation should not be an excruciating process that a faculty member must try to "survive." It should be a beneficial, positive process that supports faculty teaching development.

*Online faculty should be allowed to be present and explain a little before you take your walk through their classroom.*

The following is a model that (1) helps the evaluator and faculty member prepare for the observation, (2) provides the evaluator with a list of items to be observed, and (3) provides a look at what feedback and reflection are important after the observation. As always, the evaluator must keep in mind the importance of context-specific observation and evaluation. For example, an evaluator will be observing a faculty member teaching a biology lab differently than a faculty member giving a history lecture.

The three-step process is fairly intuitive, but a written document will aid in the consistency of the process across faculty evaluations.

## Step 1: Pre-observation discussion with faculty member

The pre-observation discussion should center on what will be specifically observed, including what the faculty member wants the evaluator to observe and those foundational items that the department or institution says must be evaluated. This could include various goals or standards of teaching and learning. A mutually beneficial time for the evaluator to observe should be arranged. Surprise visits from an evaluator may not be in the best interest of either party. Planning to observe a faculty member only to have that person showing a long video or hosting an invited guest may be a waste of valuable time. There should also be mutual agreement as to the length of the observation as well as the number of observations, if there is no department or institution standard.

The faculty member and evaluator should agree on what materials the faculty member will provide ahead of time, including such things as the course syllabus, any assignments that may be discussed, a copy of lecture notes or a lesson plan, or any other materials that will be helpful in the evaluation process.

## Step 2: Classroom observations

There are a host of things that the evaluator will be noting during an observation. These include:

- Knowledge of the subject matter
- Effective presentation of the subject matter
- Organization of course materials (all materials needed are present; distribution of materials is planned)
- A structured approach to the presentation of the subject matter
- Clear explanations of course concepts and expectations; explains in different ways if necessary
- Appropriate pedagogy, including *active learning* experiences
- Tries to reach many learning styles
- Passionate when presenting the subject matter
- Student engagement throughout the class period

The evaluator will also want to note if the instructor uses any forms of assessment of student learning. Is there ongoing informal assessment such as questioning? Do the students have a chance to discuss concepts in small or large groups? Are there any in-class activities that solidify learning or can be used to test student learning? Also important is whether the assessments match the objectives of the lesson. Is there any remediation or reteaching if students do not understand the concepts or subject matter?

One of the most important aspects for an evaluator to note is the faculty member's relationships with students. Points of observation of positive relationships include:

- Mutual respect of the students by the faculty member and of the faculty member by the students
- Ethical behavior by the faculty member and students
- A classroom environment that is safe and open; students feel free to ask questions, voice opinions, answer questions, and engage in discussions
- Appropriate classroom management techniques; students respond positively
- The use of humor (not essential, but often important)

## Step 3: Post-observation meeting

After the observation(s), it is essential that the evaluator and faculty member have a chance to debrief together in a timely and unrushed manner. To start the conversation, the evaluator may want to ask the faculty member his or her thoughts on the lesson. This gives the faculty member a chance to reflect on his or her teaching first and can give the evaluator insight into the confidence and best-practice beliefs of the faculty member. The evaluator can then give a more focused response. The evaluator should always start with positive feedback. Find something to confirm, even if it is to note how professionally the faculty member dressed or that the faculty member appeared to be very passionate about the subject matter. Immediate criticism puts the faculty member on the defensive—not a good communication technique.

It is just as important not to say anything you don't mean. Don't allude that something is terrific when it isn't. It is unfair and disrespectful (some may even say unethical) to lead a faculty member to believe that he or she is a pedagogical wonder when it isn't true. Remember to give feedback on the standards or "musts" observed as well as on the other agreed-upon items. Constructive feedback should be given so that the faculty member understands why the evaluator is giving this specific feedback and suggestions to improve. Feedback without suggestions feels like criticism.

Always save a little positivity for the end of the conversation. Again, a positive observation does not have to be award worthy, just something that the faculty member can take away and feel good about.

There should be some time for questions and clarifications by both the evaluator and the faculty member. If necessary, a written plan for faculty member improvement may be created. This may include specific, realistic goals and how to reach these goals. There may be a timeline for the achievement of the goals included.

Faculty evaluations should be viewed as an opportunity to affirm those best-practice teaching skills that are present, as well as encourage and plan for the continuation of improvement of other skills. A department leader who appropriately supports and inspires has faculty who feel valued and appreciated.

*Peggy Thelen is an associate professor of education at Alma College. She is the current chair of the education department and also serves as the early childhood education program director.*

# A Strategic, Integrative, Goal-Driven Approach to Teaching Evaluation

*Rob Kelly*

Evaluating teaching can be an anxiety-inducing endeavor for both the instructor and the evaluator. The problem: "There's not a lot of general agreement on what constitutes effective teaching evaluations," says Mark Smith, chair of the English department at Valdosta State University.

Smith was dissatisfied with the way his department evaluated its faculty members' teaching, and over time he has developed a model that reduces some of the common shortcomings of teaching evaluations.

In conversations with colleagues and through his own experience, Smith has found that teaching evaluations tend to be:

- Reactive (look to the past)—"Dr. X had a great year in the classroom."
- Esoteric (vague, open to interpretation)—"Dr. X is among the best teachers in our department."
- Platitudinal (banal)—"Dr. X always engages her students."

These shortcomings are likely the result of the way teaching is viewed, Smith says. "I think teaching is seen as an individual act. We spend years developing our repertoire of classes. We spend a long time developing classroom presence. When we're involved in something that bears our personal stamp like that, we resist other people critiquing that because more than anything else we see that as a critique of us as individuals."

Evaluators are often hesitant to be critical, Smith adds. "We tend to assume that everyone's doing at least an adequate job in the classroom, but we're not really prepared to explain how we're drawing that conclusion."

As a result of this ambiguity, Smith says, "Many people don't feel prepared to defend someone outside the context of the department or college about why the person's teaching was deemed unacceptable. So we go the safe route and give them a more positive evaluation than they might have merited." To counteract these tendencies, Smith has gradually implemented what he eventually articulated as the SIG Model of Teaching Evaluation:

- **Strategic—**As with strategic planning, a strategic teaching evaluation identifies a starting point and a direction. For example, a faculty member may be classified as a new, intermediate, or advanced instructor. Using these classifications helps in identifying goals. "You can't tell someone in an evaluation that they need to improve their teaching unless you can provide a starting point and goal," Smith says.
- **Integrative—**Teaching evaluation should consider multiple factors, Smith says. These can include things such as student evaluations, grade distributions, and self-evaluations. "It's not my purpose

to advocate that these are the three best ways of evaluating teaching. They are just the three that I have found most useful," Smith says. Smith acknowledges that student evaluations are controversial, but, he says, "a fairly accurate profile of an instructor will emerge if you look at the key written student comments that emerge consistently over time."

As for self-evaluations, Smith encourages faculty members to specifically articulate what they have done differently since the last evaluation to move, for example, from new to intermediate teacher. "I expect instructors to acknowledge their problems in their self-evaluations and explain what they're doing to address those problems," Smith says. "The process of writing a self-evaluation can be very cathartic and informative. If I can goad the faculty to write a truly reflective self-evaluation, that can result in better teaching because it can make them more aware of their strengths and weaknesses even without me talking to them," Smith says.

Smith does not assign weights to the elements of the integrative elements of teaching evaluation. "It's a very holistic exercise. When you look at student opinions of instruction, self-evaluation, and grade distributions and consider them as a whole, you're able to see a picture of an instructor emerge," Smith says.

- **Goal-Driven—**"Most instructors, especially those who are engaged in their teaching and honest about themselves, know what their goals need to be," Smith says. And they need to be measurable. A measurable goal might be, "All my students' work will be returned within a week of submission." When instructors don't come up with appropriate goals, Smith will help them, but it's best if they set their own goals.

## Outcomes

Smith is quick to point out that this approach to teaching evaluation is not new, but it helps to articulate it and remind others to make evaluations more useful. And he says that this model has had the following positive effects in his department:

- **Faculty want to discuss their evaluations.** "The most positive result I'm seeing is that faculty want to discuss their evaluations with me without necessarily questioning or challenging them. Since I've gone to a goal-driven model, they want to talk about what I think they need to achieve. Or they want to come to me before they write their self-evaluation and ask, 'What goals do you think I need to work toward?'"

- **Mentoring has improved.** "It has helped me become a better mentor. It has helped me establish stronger and more effective lines of communication with the faculty. Otherwise they get the typical esoteric teaching evaluation. They sign off on it, and we don't ever think about it again. I feel like I have a much more fruitful and productive conversation every year with my faculty when I'm using an approach like this, because it gives us tangible criteria that we can discuss. I have seen more satisfying and more productive discussions with all our faculty about their teaching, both good and bad. It also allows me to identify teachers we can use as mentors of new faculty."

*Rob Kelly is the former editor of* Academic Leader *and* Online Classroom *newsletters for Magna Publications.*

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