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# FACULTY EVALUATION: THE FREQUENCY OF CURRENT PRACTICE AND PROPOSED ALTERNATIVES

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## ABSTRACT

*With emerging new world standards and benchmarks and as institutional challenges and demand for increased accountability - in view of increased competition - continue into the new millennium for colleges and universities, faculty evaluation programs, which form a major part of this reassurance exercise, need reexamining to see how they fit with institutional purposes of evaluation. The issue is a contentious one and it has been stated that*

*'Faculty evaluation systems often have two contradictory purposes: to enhance faculty development efforts by assessing the strengths and weaknesses of individual instructors and to determine whether the employment of a faculty member should be continued or terminated'.*

*In trying to understand the impact competing values of administrators and faculty members have on faculty evaluation, it is important to try and understand the issues involved from both perspectives as the mechanism involves both sides and cannot be achieved by one without the other.*

*Reviewing available literature and reported experiences on this critical matter provides an important source of information and learned knowledge. This paper aims to put forward general conclusions and suggestions for implementing a practical and efficient faculty evaluation system that can address the various shortcomings reviewed and discussed. A brief review of the applied system at the University of Sharjah in general, and more specifically the College of Engineering, is also reported on.*

**Keywords:** *Excellence, faculty evaluation, Teaching performance, faculty development*

## الملخص

مع ظهور المعايير العالمية الجديدة وبازدياد التحديات التي تواجه المؤسسات الأكاديمية والمطالبة بزيادة المسؤولية - في ظل المنافسة المضطردة – في بداية الألفية الثالثة، أصبحت برامج تقييم أعضاء هيئة التدريس، والتي تشكل جزءا هاما من برنامج الطمأنة المتبع، بحاجة لإعادة فحصها لمعرفة مدى ملاءمتها للأهداف المؤسسية للتقييم. وهذه قضية مثيرة للنزاع إذ حسبما هو معروف فان نظم التقييم الخاصة بأعضاء هيئة التدريس غالبا ما يكون لها هدفان متناقضان: تعزيز جهود تطوير أعضاء هيئة التدريس عن طريق تقييم نقاط الضعف والقوة الفردية للأساتذة، والبت في ما إذا كان يجب تمديد أو إنهاء التعاقد مع أحد أعضاء هيئة التدريس.

ولمعرفة تأثير القيم المتنافسة للإداريين وأعضاء هيئة التدريس على عملية التقييم فانه من المهم محاولة فهم القضايا المتعلقة من المنظورين لأن العملية تشمل الجهتان ولا يمكن تحقيقها بجهة دون الأخرى. وباستعراض الأبحاث والتجارب الخاصة بهذه القضية الحساسة توفر مصدرا هاما للمعلومات اضافة إلى عرض للنظام المطبق في جامعة الشارقة عموما وكلية الهندسة بالذات، يهدف هذا البحث إلى طرح مقترحات لتطبيق نظام تقييم عملي وفعال قادر على تجاوز النواقص التي يتم استعراضها ومناقشتها.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Providing academic excellence is an objective for all respectable academic institutions and organizations. Academic excellence is measured by the quality of the research, scholarship, and the caliber of the graduates it produces along with their collective impact on the larger society. The prevailing culture must demand excellence in all endeavors. That excellence can only be achieved when all parts of the University - administration, faculty, staff, students, and alumni - are committed to the highest standards of performance.

Achieving excellence in higher education is a rigorous challenge. The path to excellence must begin with a candid acknowledgement of current position. For while academic programmes need to continuously improve in many areas, dramatic enhancements to the reality and perception of the teaching, learning, research and scholarship must be pursued continuously.

To this end, it becomes evident that a major part of achieving the set goals and objectives relies with the academic faculty whose interaction with the student body delivers the required education and therefore the expected long term results which can affect an institution's reputation in one way or another. As such, Faculty evaluation programmes have had a long history in universities and colleges.

Reviewing available literature and reported experiences on this critical matter provides an important source of information and learned knowledge. This paper aims to put forward general conclusions and suggestions for implementing a practical and efficient faculty evaluation system that can address the various shortcomings reviewed and discussed. A brief review of the applied system at the University of Sharjah in general, and more specifically the College of Engineering, is also reported on.

## 2. WHAT IS FACULTY EVALUATION?

Faculty evaluation has been defined as either (1) a process designed to improve faculty performance (a development process), or (2) a procedure that assists in making personnel decisions (a reviewing process) (Miller 1987).

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Palmer (as cited in Redmon, 1999), states that *'faculty evaluation systems often have two contradictory purposes: to enhance faculty development efforts by assessing the strengths and weaknesses of individual instructors and to determine whether the employment of a faculty member should be continued or terminated'.*

It must be agreed that 'One faculty evaluation scheme cannot both judge and assist'. The procedure that gathers evidence for dismissal is different from that which reflects a climate of support, of communication, and of growth inducement. The contentious issue has always been how these two goals of evaluation can be separated. Whilst there seems to be a clear bias to a more judgment than assistance outcome in most systems reviewed, no alternative appears to address this conflict.

In the absence of evaluation programmes that can separate these two goals this has meant that available systems continue to be supported. However, even when faculty improvement is considered the primary purpose for such evaluations, which seems to be always the case, it must be noted that the overall success of such systems is hindered by perceptions of how the results are used.

## 3. WHY FACULTY EVALUATION?

Faculty evaluations are used as a tool to address concerns about faculty quality, institutional accountability, and educational improvement that continues to be of utmost importance to universities and colleges all over the world. Nevertheless, using faculty evaluations to assess the performance of full-time faculty can be a difficult issue because university administrators and faculty members often have different perceptions about why an appraisal process is being implemented (Redmon, 1999).

## 4. THE PERCEPTION OF FACULTY EVALUATION

It is accepted that there are two distinct perceptions for the process of Faculty Evaluation, (1) an administrative perception and (2) a faculty perception. Research has found that most faculty members perceived evaluation in different terms than administrators (Neal, 1988). Whilst most administrators considered evaluation primarily a faculty development process, Faculty saw evaluation as primarily in the service of making personnel decisions. This is mainly due to the lack of clarity in setting out and identifying the purposes and objectives of the process. This often results in problems in communication and cooperation.

In trying to understand the impact competing values of administrators and faculty members have on faculty evaluation, it is important to try and understand the issues involved from both perspectives as the mechanism involves both sides and cannot be achieved by one without the other.

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The difference in perception or the 'competing values' issue is not difficult to understand. Existing Faculty Evaluation Systems do have a dual purpose in that when used to improve teaching performance, the information is given to teachers, regardless of its source (e.g. students, colleagues etc) and is meant to bring about positive changes, and support faculty development, growth, and self-improvement (Centra, Smith, as cited in Redmon, 1999). In contrast, faculty evaluation is used by administrators to make personnel decisions on tenure, promotion, reappointment and salary (Rifkin, 1995). These dual purposes served by faculty evaluations are the source of controversy.

University administrators believe that their institutions should be reputable, stable, efficient, predictable, accountable and in control of their faculty and staff. Faculty members on the other hand, generally share a belief that they should not be excluded from the decision process and that resources and power, in this respect should be shared with administrators. Creative growth and development in teaching and the nurturing and support of professional growth should also be emphasized.

These fundamental differences are referred to as 'competing values' in direct quotation from Quinn 1988, Redmon, 1999 reports the following:

*We want our organizations to be adaptable and flexible, but we also want them to be stable and controlled.*

*We want growth, resource acquisition, and external support, but we also want tight information management and formal communication.*

*We want an emphasis on the value of human resources, but we also want an emphasis on planning and goal setting.*

The question that poses itself is whether a single evaluation program can serve both: improve performance and help in personnel decisions?

The two main camps on this issue are split between supporters of the existing dual system who, nevertheless, acknowledge that limitations of time, money, and personnel render it impractical for most institutions. Nevertheless, they say, institutions should not consider substituting one program that tries to combine both functions.

Opponents of this dual system argue that whilst both purposes are vital, they cannot be served by one system and must, therefore, be kept separate. A different approach is required.

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## 5. HOW EFFECTIVE ARE FACULTY EVALUATION SYSTEMS?

The effectiveness being referred to in this question is that related to improved faculty productivity and output. Here, too, are some differing opinions and schools of thought.

Seldin (as cited by Neal, 1988) asserts that evaluation systems aimed at faculty development, which provide constructive feedback to the professor often, create a kind of dissatisfaction that motivates the professor to improve. Chances for faculty improvement increase when:

- Immediate feedback is given,
- The professor wants to improve, and
- The professor knows how to bring about the improvement.

The other view is that although most institutions identify faculty improvement as their primary goal, Moomaw (1977) believes that most evaluation systems do not stimulate and support faculty development effectively. He cites the lack of connection between evaluation and development activities, and the absence of faculty involvement in the process of evaluation as the chief reasons for the uneven, or poor, effectiveness of programs at most institutions (ERIC, 1988).

The claim that instructional evaluation alone improves teaching is not supported by available literature. It is suggested that faculty members often must be provided with an understanding of teaching and learning theories, as well as opportunities to develop and practice teaching skills in a non-threatening environment. To be helpful in improving faculty performance, instructional evaluation must identify specific difficulties, not just assess the general quality of instruction.

## 6. THE UNIVERSITY OF SHARJAH (UOS) EXPERIENCE

The University of Sharjah (UOS) has paid particular attention to the issue of quality and standards. Performance evaluation of staff figured in from the very early days of this young institution. However, and given the relatively very short period in the life of this academic institution there is no clear system that is applied across the board yet.

The five (5) colleges of the UOS each organizes and executes its own version or programme for Faculty Evaluation. This is somewhat understandable given the different nature of disciplines being covered within the different colleges.

Being directly involved in the process adopted by the College of Engineering, which was the first such programme to commence at the University level, we can report the following historical development and where we are today in this respect. The programme aims at identifying strengths and weaknesses in the teaching process. Classroom visits are the main

aspect of this evaluation whereby a schedule of assigned reviews and reviewers is distributed to all faculty members some 2 weeks in advance. Lectures and times are identified as well as the evaluation sheets and details as the reviewers would complete them. On the set date, two faculty members now make a visit, which was previously done by one member only, to the teacher and lecture subject to the review. There are no rules or regulations as to the rank or seniority of the staff conducting the evaluation.

The two faculty members who would both sign it and review it with the concerned teacher then complete the visit report.

The system is simple and straightforward. The process is quite informal and transparent and it has been stressed that the objectives must include a benefit to the visiting members in terms of teaching methods and/or style.

Student assessments are an integral part of the evaluation process too. These are collected from every class taught by the teacher and any instructors or lab assistants that may be involved in the course. The results are analyzed and disseminated to the concerned faculty with points and marks referenced to a college wide average as per to the performance and the student perceptions.

A staff annual report, prepared by the faculty member is also an integral part of the evaluation process. The report entails details on all teaching and other extra curricular activities including committee memberships and community service, as well as research and publications.

Faculty being faculty and administrators being administrators the world over, it is fair to report that the system, which is continually being developed, still falls out of being satisfactory, at least at the faculty level. Several concerns have been raised but it must be noted to the credit of the programme that a high degree of transparency has been achieved. Yet, the procedural approach and the outcome of this review still leave a lot to be achieved.

Most recently, the Civil Engineering Department Council decided to form a committee to recommend an alternative *Peer Assessment* process. As a result, and based on the guidelines discussed during several staff meetings, the committee developed new forms for assessment. The new forms were presented for discussion during a staff meeting and faculty members were invited to comment on the forms within a period of one week following that meeting.

The forms were then modified according to the comments received and the modified forms are to be submitted for decision at the next staff meeting.

The new forms allow the *Instructor* the opportunity to nominate an *Observer* and explain why a particular observer has been nominated. The *Instructor* is also given the choice to specify

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the activity to be assessed. The forms give the *Instructor* the option of selecting the teaching and learning aspects for peer observation. These aspects include the following:

- General impression of effectiveness
- Effectiveness of visual aids
- Effectiveness of whiteboard use
- Voice clarity and effectiveness
- Body language and gestures
- General lecture environment
- Pace of delivery
- Flexibility and use of instant student feedback
- Technical aspects and content.

The *Observer* then completes a single sheet that covers his/her remarks and rates the overall effectiveness of the observation on a scale from 1 –10.

## 7. GOOD PRACTICE AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Procedural Evaluation elements tend to vary from one institution to another; however, there are main elements that are shared amongst all with slight variations on some. The applied approach is one that has resulted from the 'competing values' of faculty and administrators.

This procedural approach developed form the desire of administrations and stake holders to exercise institutional control to assure quality teaching, student satisfaction, excellence and accountability. This approach gives faculty members more input and say in the process. Under this approach, self-evaluations together with peer, student and administrator appraisals on ongoing basis are taken into account for both purposes of a dual evaluation. This approach is characterized by input from faculty members as well as administrators with an emphasis on teaching. A self-report prepared by the faculty member carries its weight amongst student feedback and colleague appraisals.

Whilst the guidelines for such a procedure vary from college to college and even from department to department (as is the case at UOS), the basic procedure in all involves the following steps (Ackerman, 1996; Smith & Barber, 1994):

1. A pre-evaluation meeting between the faculty member and the department chair or dean to discuss the goals, objectives, and items to be evaluated.
2. A classroom visit is made during the evaluation period by the department chairperson or dean to observe the faculty member's teaching style.

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3. The faculty member compiles a self-evaluation, student evaluation rating forms, and a list of professional development activities.
4. A performance review conference is set up at the end of the evaluation period between faculty member and department chair or dean.
5. The department chair or dean renders a judgment based on the collected data.
6. As a final step, the faculty member can appeal if the appraisal is not satisfactory.

Appendix A, at the end of this paper reports on two experiences from US colleges in this respect.

There is little doubt, if any, that a common objective between faculty members and administrators is the establishment of a successful evaluation program. The success of such a programme would deliver to each party its objectives and ensures that the academic accountability issue is properly addressed at all levels. This, however, requires a balance that cannot be achieved very simply.

The literature review on this matter seems to converge on some general rules and guidelines that may assist in developing more successful programs than what exists. These can be summarized as follows:

- Clarity in defining the purpose of the evaluation
- Compatibility of process and purpose
- Faculty involvement in all aspects
- Administrative commitment to the evaluation process must go hand in hand with commitment to due process, including written and published criteria for evaluation and appeal
- As much as possible, institutional needs must be balanced with individual faculty needs
- Evaluation linked to faculty development and incentives.
- All evaluation procedures must be applied consistently and fairly
- Multiple sources of faculty data must be included in the evaluation
- Customization of successfully used evaluation programmes at other institutions before using them
- Introduction of several levels of review and appeal.

When using these guidelines in the evaluation process a number of positive outcomes can be accomplished:

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- Improve faculty perception and minimize their resistance to evaluation.
- Establish the lines of communication between faculty and administration on faculty effectiveness.
- Allow an integration of evaluation into decision-making and development processes on campus.

## 8. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

With emerging new world standards and benchmarks and as institutional challenges and demand for increased accountability - in view of increased competition - continue into the new millennium for colleges and universities, faculty evaluation programs, which form a major part of this reassurance exercise, need reexamining to see how they fit with institutional purposes of evaluation.

Faculty evaluation is no doubt a key element in improving the performance and effectiveness of academic institutions. If developed and applied properly they can contribute to the institution's mission in achieving excellence and benchmark reputation. However, the intrinsic conflict in purpose and perceptions needs to be dealt with in a manner that can satisfy both objectives without a clear bias towards one over the other.

An assessment of practices of evaluation is also necessary to determine a program's effectiveness in promoting faculty development and productivity. Adequate and unbiased evaluation programs can only be achieved when administrators involve faculty members in the process of determining the evaluation's purpose, its scope, and sources of data, participants, and the assessment of effectiveness.

The backbone of any evaluation must be its purpose. The purpose of evaluation dictates the questions asked, influences the sources of data utilized, the depth of analysis, and the dissemination of findings. The professional development and growth of faculty members needs to be addressed adequately within the scope of the evaluation. A continually developing and improving faculty member plays an important part in the collective pursuit of institutional development and excellence.

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## APPENDIX 1

## EXAMPLES ON ESTABLISHED FACULTY EVALUATION SYSTEMS

Source: Community College Review, summer 1999

### *The AWCC Example*

At Arizona Western Community College (AWCC), a faculty task force created and distributed surveys to faculty members in an attempt to get faculty to define components of their job and rate each component on its relative importance (ERIC, 1999). In conjunction with the faculty survey, the AWCC administrators implemented a procedural evaluation that consisted of the following steps:

1. Each instructor and his or her division chair select two classes to be appraised.

2. Students rate faculty classroom teaching.

3. Faculty members rate themselves and detail in writing their service and professional growth.

4. The department chairs rate each of their faculty members on appropriate aspects of teaching and in the areas of service and professional growth.

5. Each division chair is provided with a compilation of student and faculty ratings

6. An interview takes place between the faculty member and division chair to compare the ratings.

7. The chair then prepares a summary report with recommendation about professional growth and personnel decisions.

The first year of the comprehensive evaluation was run as a pilot. This pilot enabled the task force to make adjustments to the system and resulted in tested and error-free evaluation tools.

### *The OCC Example*

Oklahoma Community College (OCC) provides another example of how administrators have used a procedural evaluation. Ackerman (1996) cited in ERIC, 1999 reports that administrators at OCC evaluate their full-time faculty members by following four broad and flexible steps:

1. The first step involves a meeting between faculty and the dean to discuss goals, expectations, activities, and areas of emphasis for the upcoming year. Areas of

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emphasis might include instructional effectiveness, professional development, and college and professional activities. The OCC evaluation process requires mutual agreement--only those items (sources of information, performance categories, or level of emphasis for each performance category) to which both the faculty member and dean agree are included in the evaluation.

2. The second step in the evaluation process at OCC involves a discussion between the faculty member and dean on matters related to performance as the need arises. In this step, mutually agreed-upon changes in goals and expectations may be made as a result of a mid-year conference.

3. The third step in the process is the annual performance review and evaluation conference, which takes place at the end of the evaluation period. Each performance indicator is reviewed using standard and agreed upon sources of input, the faculty member's self-evaluation, and the dean's observations.

4. The fourth step gives the faculty member the opportunity to appeal the evaluation through a follow-up conference with the dean. If not resolved, the faculty member submits a written statement of the case to the director of human resources. A performance review committee functions to ensure that the faculty member was treated and evaluated fairly. The review committee reports its findings to the vice president, who makes the final decision in the matter.

Redmon, 1999, cites that one of the strengths of the OCC procedural evaluation process is the flexibility given to faculty members. The notion that only mutually agreed upon items are included in the appraisal probably appeals to many faculty members because it can be seen as a form of shared governance. On the down side, however, Ackerman (1996) does not provide an explanation of what may happen to the evaluation process at OCC if the faculty person and dean cannot agree on what to include in the appraisal. Nor is there an explanation of what (at a minimum) must be included in the process of evaluating full-time faculty members. Unlike the other example discussed in this section, which provide a list of what must be included in the evaluation process, OCC suggests that everything in the evaluation process is subject to negotiation between the faculty member and dean.

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