

Evaluating Faculty with Specific Concerns: What, Why, and How

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Evaluations mandated by institutions generally assess application of faculty expertise to teaching, research, and service. But as Keig (1994) states in *Collaborative Peer Review*, "Clearly, there is more to teaching than having a command of the subject matter, as essential as that is." How can objective data be gathered on faculty issues unrelated to expertise that may be affecting the unit?

According to Hecht (1999) in *The Department Chair as Academic Leader*, "Rather than relying on consistent criteria applicable to a broad range of persons, the criteria may be specific to a discipline, or even individuals within that discipline." One way to gather pertinent data is with a supplementary formative evaluation.

WHAT: THE TOP 10 LIST

Experiential research demonstrates that concerns for specific faculty members are usually related to how they relate to students and other faculty, not with expertise. Ferdinand Fournies (2000) confirms this in *Coaching for Improved Work Performance*: "One of the most common reasons why employees do not get promoted is ineffective people-to-people relationships."

A solution found to be effective is a survey instrument created specifically for the academic unit. Depending on rank, tenure status, or concerns for faculty performance, the survey may be required of certain faculty and optional for others. However, whether for a first-year instructor or for a tenured associate professor seeking promotion, only members of a committee of senior faculty (who would later be making actual personnel recommendations) would complete the survey. Converting observations into empirical data is accomplished by stating each criterion in the affirmative and providing numerically ranked "strongly," "somewhat," or "do not agree" responses. Provision should also be made for anonymous written comments.

A "Top 10" listing of criteria for such a survey could include:

1. Understands what is motivational to student learning.
 2. Is flexible, can adapt to evolving situations.
 3. Holds high standards without being perceived as negatively critical.
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4. Makes appropriate attempts to respond to concerns of students.
5. Treats all students equally.
6. Promotes faculty unity, demonstrates ability to function as a team player.
7. Makes plans in the context of the overall unit.
8. Considers how comments will be perceived by others before they are made.
9. Assumes responsibilities in a timely manner.
10. Is an active and willing participant in committee work and collaboration.

WHY: EVERYBODY WINS

A supplementary evaluation should create a win-win situation. It should be about edification of the individual and bringing his or her strengths into alignment with departmental needs. The goal is to produce a valued colleague who contributes fully toward the unit's mission.

Benefits for the unit—Faculty members typically perceive relatively little autonomy over their units. A supplementary evaluation could serve to change this inasmuch as the process is completely what the faculty chooses to make of it. Hecht illustrates this: "Evaluation is made worthwhile by the promise of improvements for the unit and the expanded influence it gives the unit over its fate."

Benefits for the individual—No one goes to work intending to do a bad job. Indeed, it is human nature to perceive oneself as doing a good job. Yet, to the contrary, Fournies demonstrates that, "In a survey of 4,000 managers the question was asked, 'Why don't employees do what they are supposed to do?'" One of the most frequent responses was, "They think they are doing it." Hence, a supplementary evaluation could benefit individuals by removing a scotoma and providing insight as to how they may enhance their opportunities for advancement.

HOW: COMMUNICATION

According to Fournies, "In the study of human behavior, psychologists discovered that feedback is one of the most critical requirements for sustained high-level performance of any human act." And when relaying concerns, there is no substitute for a face-to-face interaction between the executive and the individual faculty member.

A "together we can work this out" approach is the key to keeping communication open. Let the individual know that you have confidence in his or her ability to make a change and, just as important, that you are charging him or her with conforming to this expectation.

Fournies presents a guide for the face-to-face meeting: "If you want people to select better alternatives, let them understand the consequences of the alternative they are selecting and give them more alternatives to select from." Academic executives should have a wealth of experiences to draw from for advice (or know where to go to find these). Some tried-and-proven methods include suggesting self-help or psychology readings, funding attendance at a motivational workshop, recommending professional counseling, or identifying a trusted faculty member as a mentor. If none of these activities seem appropriate, ask the individual to develop his or her own plan and use this as a benchmark to measure progress. The responsibility for change is, after all, with the faculty member, not the executive.

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