

To: Dean Alan Dorsey
Franklin College of Arts and Sciences
University of Georgia

From: The Franklin College Committee on Faculty Affairs

Re: Annual Faculty Evaluations

cc: Senior Associate Dean Hugh Ruppensburg,
Provost Pamela Whitten,
President Jere Morehead

Dear Dean Dorsey:

As you know, on October 31, 2015, the Provost's office unveiled a new version of the guidelines for annual faculty review, Academic Affairs Policy Manual 1.06-1,

<http://provost.uga.edu/index.php/policies/academic-affairs-policy-manual/1-06-1-written-annual-review> .

On December 14, 2015, the Provost sent an email message to the deans with the instruction that the deans share the message with their faculty. The message acknowledged "significant miscommunication about the goals and processes to reach these goals," in reference to the changes in policy. The message also expressed the Provost's view "that the faculty in each unit should determine the standards to be employed for annual review, as well as for promotion and tenure."

Thus the process of putting the new policy in place is far from over. Many faculty members have raised objections to both the content of the new policy and the paucity of faculty consultation in the crafting of it. The committee hopes that as this process moves forward the faculty will be consulted. The committee stands ready to assist in this effort.

Article III section IV item 1 of the Franklin College bylaws charges the Franklin College Committee on Faculty Affairs to "recommend to the Senate, to the Dean, and to administrators and staff of the University ways to improve conditions of employment for the Faculty of the College." Herein are our recommendations in this matter, preceded by a statement of principles.

We emphasize that this is a matter of extreme importance.

I. Principles

A. Importance of annual review and the need for evaluation:

Peer review of faculty activity is vital to the success of the University of Georgia in carrying out its three-part mission of research, teaching and service. It is therefore important that each faculty member

prepare an annual summary of his or her accomplishments and activities, and that this summary be reviewed at the level of the member's promotion and tenure unit. Such review serves several purposes. For all faculty, regardless of rank, the review process is an aid to professional development. For faculty seeking promotion and/or tenure, such review informs the faculty member of progress towards those goals. The annual review also plays a role in determining raises, highlighting outstanding accomplishments and identifying areas where improvement may be needed. To serve as a useful tool, the annual review must therefore be more than a summary of activity. It must contain an evaluative component.

B. Principles necessary for a fair and effective evaluative process:

Appropriateness: The basis on which a given faculty member's annual accomplishments are to be evaluated must take into account the culture of the discipline in which the faculty member is engaged and the stage of the faculty member's career. For instance, assistant professors hoping to be granted tenure and associate professors hoping to be promoted to full professor should receive feedback on their progress towards those goals. Full professors on the other hand are expected to do the unexpected and to redefine the frontiers of their discipline and therefore should be judged on a different set of parameters.

Narrative Flow: The nature of academic work is such that a scorecard is not sufficiently robust to capture the contributions of the faculty. Therefore, it is essential that the faculty be allowed and indeed encouraged to provide a narrative description of their accomplishments. It is equally important that the department heads in their summary evaluations transmit the relevant portions of this narrative to the dean.

Equal Opportunity to Communicate: It is obvious that all faculty should be treated equally and fairly in the evaluation process. However, fairness and equality are not achieved by having the same structure for all disciplines. What is important is that the capacity of the structure to communicate the achievements of the individual faculty member be uniform across disciplines, departments, and colleges. Some departments may find it more effective to base their judgments strictly on numerical data such as numbers of publications and teaching evaluation scores, while other departments may find it more effective to communicate in a more narrative fashion.

Clarity: Whatever the format for communicating information, the annual review must conclude with a clear statement that indicates how well the faculty member is performing.

II. Recommended Actions

Given the Provost's directive in her email message to ensure fairness and consistency, and given that the promotion and tenure units have been directed by the Provost both to develop the new criteria this academic year and implement the new procedure with a completion date of March 31, 2016, the committee recommends to the Dean that

1. the departments of the college be allowed to carry out their faculty evaluations in whatever manner best suits them, consistent with the principles stated in part I.

2. that a grading system or scorecard, such as "does not meet/meets/exceeds standard", not be required.

Sincerely,

The Franklin College Committee on Faculty Affairs

Appendix: Messages sent to the Franklin Committee on Faculty Affairs from Franklin College faculty, in response to the new policy

"I share the concerns expressed in the message from the Faculty Affairs Committee regarding the lack of clarity of the "ratings" themselves, and the consequences to faculty of receiving a given rating. I would add that as a faculty member I find the assignment of ratings such as these to be demeaning and demoralizing."

"Like everyone I suppose, I have concerns about the lack of clarity as to the meaning of these rankings and the implications of receiving a given score.' "

"In terms of protocol, how were these new criteria designed? "Exceeds" is rhetorically quite high and suggests it will be granted only in exceptional cases. The general tone of the assessment is that of provisional, reserved acceptance. This evidently reflects an administrative cultural shift from "recommendation" to "expectations". Tone and style of course matter, especially in leadership. "

"Scholarship: Obviously, the emphasis on quantitative, rather than qualitative data does not align with many fields of humanities and the liberal arts. I note in the language the clear emphasis on qualitative first and evaluative as a secondary issue. The request for a quantitative listing of grant dollars is unprecedented to my knowledge. Grants fund research. Grants are not scholarship. This is a dangerous blurring of finances and real scholarly product. "

"There are many disturbing aspects of the new system but one is that all faculty, all staff, all fields, all specialties, are evaluated with the same bland categories, ones which don't even take into account an exceptional year someone may have, and also do not evaluate the individual as a whole but instead "grades" each faculty in each category as a separate unit. There seems no evaluating of the faculty member as a person with dedication and strengths in different areas or even taking into account an individual who may have had extenuating circumstances or an individual who has devoted a particular year to service or teaching for the department's sake and needs and so had less time for research or one of the other combinations. And what by the way is "meeting expectations" anyway?? This is the University system as imitating the corporation at its worse. "

"It is quite remarkable how all of this has transpired with little faculty awareness or discussion. "

“The problem with any type of evaluation based on simple metrics is how the weighting process is distributed among diverse faculty. Simply basing it on EFT does not work well since an EFT does not encompass all activities we can be possibly be involved in and how our activities change from year to year. “

“(1) Faculty have not been involved in the process of evaluating our system of evaluations. (2) It's not clear how "expectations" are to be defined. (3) The three evaluation scores are an extreme oversimplification of the work of faculty and how that work evolves over time (i.e., an increase in service, involvement in things like study abroad). (4) It's not clear what the new format is designed to do, other than force out low-performing faculty - is that the problem that is being "solved" here? (5) It is doubtful whether department heads will be inclined to give faculty "below expectations" scores because that will just create another set of headaches, i.e., coming up with remedial plans, dealing with discontented faculty, and so. (6) The organizational and management literature is pretty clear that these kinds of annual performance review (i.e., a ranking or scoring of employees) are a really bad motivational tool - it just discourages people rather than the reverse. “

“It is difficult to evaluate output especially in non-science fields. If someone spends 3 years writing a book rather than publishing a paper or two a year - how is credit given on an annual basis for working on the book? The private sector has learned the hard way that metrics can be very destructive. But they do provide administrators the illusion of basing decisions on “data”.”

“My concern is that if the department heads actually use benchmarks of our "comparator" departments (which, in the case of Genetics is particularly inappropriate), we will all be rated as not meeting expectations. The statement that those not meeting expectations will be punished makes a mockery of tenure.”

“The collected thoughts from the xxx Department can be summarized in three points. First, we embrace the need for annual evaluations. Second, the new annual evaluation process should have had input from the departments and college before being ratified and distributed. This process caught faculty off guard. Third, departments should be given time to decide what exceeds, meets, and does not meet on an annual bases. A faculty member is likely to have years in which a lot of papers are published and other years in which few or no papers are actually published. “

“Why has this new system been proposed? What were the deficiencies of the previous process and how does the new proposal address them? I do not think something new should be adopted unless it is a marked improvement over the old and does not introduce any new problems of its own.”

“How are expectations to be defined? Are these University-wide standards, or will they vary to fit the individual needs of schools, disciplines, and programs? The faculty in departments should have a say in these matters, since they are the ones who know best what the demands of their discipline are.”

“Conducting research and teaching are not linear occupations. Some years are more productive than others. Will expectations be attuned to the vicissitudes endemic in the profession? In other words, are expectations tied to yearly achievements, or will they (or some of them) be broadened to include long-term goals? This is particularly important in the humanities, where the research paradigm is significantly different from that of the sciences.”

“The problem with any kind of numeric measure is context. Numbers untethered to concrete realities are meaningless. How will the new procedure be able to provide sufficient context for the objective measurements it is designed to produce? What makes these numbers meaningful? If the numbers will have consequences what is the justification for using the numbers as a basis for any decision?”

"Thorough, productive annual evaluations and post-tenure review are beneficial to faculty and help to make UGA a better place. However, it is concerning to me how much of this process has occurred without any communication with, or input from, any channels of faculty governance around campus, namely college senates or University Council. Many of the fears and concerns of faculty could easily have been remedied if the appropriate governance committees had been involved in this process from step one."

“A clear and transparent articulation of the proposal and its ramifications needs to be formulated, disseminated, and discussed before any binding decision be made.”

“I assume that Faculty Affairs would not look favorably on a proposal to scrap the new rankings--but I think that would be the best approach.”

“The most comprehensive research on performance evaluations was conducted by Mount, Scullen, & Goff, 2000 in the Journal of Applied Psychology. They found that 62% of the variance in ratings could be accounted for raters' own unique perceptions. Actual performance accounted for only 21%. Essentially ratings tell you more about raters than they do about the person being rated.”

“For faculty, you don't want the simplest view of a faculty members' performance but the richest. “