

# A Note on the Philosophy Behind the Evaluation of Faculty

W. S. JANNA\*

Department of Mechanical Engineering, Memphis State University, Memphis, TN 38152, U.S.A.

G. S. JAKUBOWSKI†

College of Science and Engineering, Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, CA 90045, U.S.A.

---

## INTRODUCTION

THIS is a brief note written to colleagues of ours all over the world who have been involved in evaluations of faculty. As you may recall, Volume 7, Number 3 of this journal contained a rating method for the evaluation of faculty. This method was not merely one that we made up, but represents many hours of work and refinement. The paper has been presented in a number of different forums and it has always generated a great deal of discussion. The topic of faculty evaluation is an interesting, emotive issue and we believe it merits further discussion in perhaps the form of an interchange of ideas. *The International Journal of Applied Engineering Education* is an ideal place for this interchange to occur. We should like to ask some questions for discussion, provide opinions based on our experience, and invite interested readers to respond.

## DISCUSSION

### 1. Does an evaluation of faculty need to be performed?

It is our contention that it does indeed among non-unionized faculty whenever annual merit reviews need to be performed. An evaluation provides a means of rewarding faculty members who are contributing to the overall goals of the department, college and university. It also provides a relative comparison of faculty member's performance to his/her counterparts. Also, but by no means finally, the faculty member can identify weaknesses where improvements can be realized.

### 2. Should student evaluations be considered?

It is our contention that student evaluations should be part of the review process whenever teaching is a regular part of the duties of the faculty

member. Student evaluations tend to be reliable (statistically), as pointed out by various references cited in our original article. If a faculty member is not teaching well, student evaluations may be a way of finding this out, or at least call attention to it. The objective is *not* to find weaknesses and exploit them. The objective *is* to find places where a faculty member could make improvements in his/her teaching performance. The ultimate winners are the students, the faculty member and the institution.

### 3. How should teaching, research and service contributions be weighted?

This is a difficult point to address because of the many ruling factions involved. An upper level administrator might want research with external funding to be very heavily weighted. On the other hand, students might want teaching to be considered most important. A public relations-minded administrator might want service activities outside the institution to be at the forefront. Ideally, the faculty in the department should decide collectively on how the department should develop and what areas to stress the most (subject to the stated goals of the institution). Furthermore, the variations in ability and interests of the faculty should be considered. A faculty member who enjoys teaching and does well in the classroom should be able to develop this talent by teaching more courses. A faculty member who is good at conducting research should have an environment that is conducive to providing him/her with the means necessary to continue to develop professionally in this area. Efforts should be taken to ensure that a good balance exists among the specialties represented in each department. The balance should, in addition, be consistent with departmental goals.

### 4. Should faculty decide on the evaluation criteria?

It is our contention that they *must* do so in order to select a direction for the department to take. A

---

\* Professor. Please direct all correspondence to this author.

† Professor and Dean.

faculty member must remember that the best interests of the institution are as important as his/her own self-interests.

5. *Should the department chair have a share in the evaluation?*

The department chair should perform individual evaluations in an effort to ascertain whether departmental goals are met. The chair must remember that each and every individual believes he/she is doing a good job, regardless of whether this is the case. A department chair can quickly extinguish the morale in the department by not tactfully pointing out areas that need strengthening. We believe it would be helpful for a department chair to take a continuing education course in effective management techniques before performing an evaluation.

6. *Should the faculty member be able to appeal against decisions made on the basis of the evaluation?*

At some institutions, evaluation scores are used to calculate annual pay increases as well as determine teaching loads, allocate travel funds, decide on where equipment funds should be channeled, etc. In such cases, and really in all cases, the faculty member should have the right to appeal. Personal prejudices exist and there must be a safeguard against them.

7. *Does the faculty member have a right to compare his own evaluation results with those of his/her colleagues?*

Yes, if only to determine whether he/she compares with others within the department. Many people would like to compare their performance with that of their colleagues in much the same way that one student wants to know how his/her friend performed on the same test both had taken. However, the reviewer should provide this information without divulging which faculty member earned which evaluation. The right to privacy of other faculty members is important. The reviewer should let each faculty member know how he/she compares with the others while maintaining the anonymity of the other faculty.

8. *What are possible sources of information on the faculty member's performance?*

For teaching, one possible source of information is student evaluations or even alumni evaluations. For research and service, the best source is usually the faculty member. Outside information can be sought usually in the form of supportive letters attesting to the quality and significance of research or the time spent in committee work.

9. *How frequently should a faculty member's performance be evaluated?*

Evaluations are a necessary but often unpleasant part of the job of the reviewer. One answer is 'as infrequently as possible'. More realistically, perhaps once per year is sufficient. At most institutions this is a minimum, and in large departments, evaluations and meetings with individual faculty members could take significant amounts of time.

## CONCLUSIONS

The philosophy of faculty evaluations can be summarized with the following conclusions:

- The goals of the institution, college and department need to be identified.
- The faculty members (the most important resource of any institution) should decide collectively on which direction to take the department (e.g. more research, higher teaching loads, etc.), within the confines of the identified goals.
- The department chair should evaluate each faculty member according to how he/she has performed relative to the departmental goals.
- The reviewer's job is to help the faculty member become better at his/her work and to develop professionally.

With regard to the issues and questions raised here, we should like to invite faculty members and administrators from various institutions to express their opinions and experiences regarding faculty evaluation. We are soliciting responses not only from the U.S.A. but also from other countries. We look forward to reading your comments and to an informative exchange of ideas.