

Setting and Achieving Appropriate Expectations for Faculty Performance  
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In this era of accountability, the department chair occupies perhaps the most important position in evaluating faculty. At most colleges and universities, faculty members are reviewed annually and during promotion and tenure mileposts.

Research and anecdotal experiences indicate that faculty evaluation is among the most disliked and difficult tasks for chairs. Faculty evaluations are made difficult by the conditions of how we work such as tenure and various other protections from unions and the academic culture. Furthermore, we work with people who for the most part have terminal degrees in their fields and are quite accomplished and are accustomed to working alone without supervision, leading many faculty members to feel put out or even insulted by the evaluation process.

Nevertheless, faculty evaluations are becoming increasingly important; pay raises are merit-based to various degrees and the role of reviews in promotion and tenure has never been more critical. In addition, external forces holding colleges and universities accountable for their activities exert pressure on faculty reviews to follow a more “personnel management” style than in times past.

Lastly, faculty are wanting more feedback on their performance than in times past, and department chairs are expected to mentor faculty members and nurture their talents and productivity.

The purpose of this presentation is to help chairs identify best practices for conducting annual reviews of faculty members and promote the idea that evaluations can and should be more supportive and constructive and less critical and punitive.

The presentation will have three sections. The first part of the presentation will be a discussion of performance expectations that will focus on setting clear and transparent goals. Expectations will be discussed as being more than objective or standardized measures, but as having a qualitative component that will account for individuals’ work as a whole.

Second, the discussion will stress best practices for faculty evaluation. Key points here will be: creating clear unit expectations of performance; making evaluation a “stream of consciousness”, rather than just “the meeting” that occurs every year; offering action plans for improvement; focusing on consistency; and providing supportive and constructive reviews. The concept stressed here is how to balance summative and formative content in a faculty review.

Finally, the presentation will demonstrate examples of constructive and positive language for reviews in comparison to examples of unhelpful or vague comments. Scenarios will be shown in which participants interactively will identify and respond to hypothetical examples of faculty performance.