



## Department Chair Online Resource Center

# Developing an Organizational Culture and Infrastructure for Administrative Evaluation and Feedback

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At many universities, the focus for evaluations has been on 1) faculty promotion and tenure, 2) teaching performance, and 3) student outcomes. With evaluations and reviews concentrating on these three areas, the evaluation of administrative personnel, including deans, department chairs, and executive personnel, has been critically absent. Given the important functions, demands, and responsibilities performed by administrators, evaluation of their performance should play a more central part in evaluation efforts.

A successful implementation and sustainability of this process depends on three preconditions. First, the purpose of the process must be clearly and explicitly understood and communicated. Second, there must be the full support of the organization from all levels. Finally, there must be a sense of trust and confidentiality in the process.

### **BUILDING AN ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE FOR ADMINISTRATIVE EVALUATIONS**

The purpose of the evaluation drives the process. The two most common purposes are self-development and administrative decisions. This would include:

- Improving administrative performance.
- Improving department/unit performance.
- Assisting administration in making effective decisions.
- Salary increases.
- Promotions.
- Reappointment.

However, other purposes exist, such as assessing department climate, performing an organizational needs analysis, and reviewing complex system performance. Clearly, one size or process will not fit all of these purposes.

Essentially, all parties must have a clear concept of how evaluations are intended to be used. The purpose should clearly communicate and support methods to assist in the person's and unit's

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development (Bracken & Timmreck, 2001). In turn, the evaluation information collected must reflect the purposes, for example, detailed, open-ended comments for feedback versus ratings for salary administration.

Once a purpose has been established, the decision regarding who will provide the evaluation information is important. While the most commonly used source has been the direct supervisor, more recent efforts have included other individuals and/or groups who frequently interact with the individual, are able to rate the individual's job performance, and whose opinions are valued by the individual (Mount, Judge, Scullen, Sytsma, & Hezlett, 1998). Each group can bring a unique perspective to the process. Supervisors generally see the end process, peers see the individual in an administrative context, subordinates (faculty or staff) see the person in a day-to-day context, and clients (outside constituents) see the person in a specific outcome context. Each perspective provides a piece of the puzzle to construct the entire picture of the person's performance.

Administrative evaluations cannot be sustained in a nonsupportive environment. Expectations, procedures, and uses must be codified by the organization. To fully realize a shared governance environment, the "rules" must become a part of the organizational culture and process, be implemented, and generate outcomes related to the evaluation. Essentially, four main conditions must be in place on campus in order to have a successful evaluation system:

- Institutional support from the top down.
- Acceptance by the campus culture (e.g., designated in the university handbook).
- Trust in the leadership to support, believe, and act on the results.
- Protection of confidentiality.

## **INFRASTRUCTURE FOR ADMINISTRATIVE EVALUATION AND FEEDBACK**

For an effective evaluation system, many steps need to be performed, including: 1) developing an administrative evaluation form, 2) implementing an evaluation process, and 3) sustaining the process over the years and within units. These steps are critical and must tie in to the agreed-upon purpose. Without a clear purpose, the process results in a poor evaluation system.

Unlike department evaluations that are individualized and highly discipline bound, administrative evaluations may vary significantly between units because of the unit's mission and role. Therefore, administrative evaluations need to be developed and administered through a central office within the university. For many institutions without a central survey or evaluation office, the institutional research

office has been designated to assist in the development and administration of administrative evaluations. All in all, the designated office should have integrity, accountability, ability to understand the necessity for confidentiality, and experience in survey design and assessment.

While faculty and student evaluation tools can take many forms depending on the discipline, department chairs have similar responsibilities and expectations, as do deans. Differences among administrative units are more likely to require modifications. Thus, evaluation forms and procedures need to be designed with the capability to add questions that are specific to the unit or individual. Three specific administrative evaluations are typical: department head, dean (assistant and associate deans), and other unit heads.

## **EVALUATION PROCESS**

Depending upon the university policies regulating administrative evaluations, individuals may request to have an evaluation administered or the evaluation may be a mandate established by the university for a more comprehensive evaluation. A periodic review (e.g., the administrator's term) is a common form. Also, the results might be either distributed to the individual only; to the individual and his or her dean, vice president, or provost; or to a committee. The purpose generally drives who will receive the results.

Once an evaluation is requested, the individual to be evaluated is contacted about the process and how the results will be distributed, documented, and used. The individual is also given the opportunity to review the evaluation instrument and add questions, but cannot change the existing instrument. Also, cover letters to accompany the evaluations are written. This process involves the individual and provides a review of the evaluation methods. In addition, an appropriate timeline to administer the evaluation and complete the results is established.

Once the development process is complete, a list of people to participate in the evaluation process needs to be generated. Typically, for department chairs/heads, the faculty and/or unclassified personnel within the department are the primary respondents. For individuals at the dean level or above, including a variety of employees is desirable. Information gathered from different people based upon their interaction with the individual can be very valuable. The more information that is gathered, the better and more comprehensive the performance review is likely to be.

The evaluation is distributed to the participants, who are given seven to ten days to respond. In some cases, for verification, the respondents may be requested to print their name and sign the back of the return envelope. Responses are removed from the envelope, the person is verified as a valid respondent,

and the envelope is discarded. No identification is left on the evaluation materials. As an alternate process to fully protect anonymity, evaluations are sealed in plain envelopes, dropped in a sealed box in the evaluation office, and the person responding is checked off of a list of valid respondents. At a minimum, a 30 percent response rate is recommended. To increase response rate, it may be necessary to send a reminder e-mail or letter to participants. The data are then compiled or scanned, reviewed, and the verbatim written comments are entered into a word processing file. For the written comments, any names or department relationship that could identify the respondent are removed. Also, the office compiling the results may want to exclude any comments that are not related to the evaluation or are inflammatory.

The individual (or other individuals or groups, depending upon the purpose) receives a summarized report of the aggregated data, including the written comments. The review committee or the provost/vice president makes recommendations for improvement and program development in a separate report. Again, maintaining the confidentiality of the respondent and the results is critical.

Even with preexisting evaluation forms, the entire process may take from three to eight weeks before the individual receives results from the evaluation.

The following web pages are available as resources for this evaluation process:

- Examples of department head evaluation forms, letters, and explanation of results: <http://www.ksu.edu/pa/admineval/admineval.htm>
- University handbook dean's evaluation process (C157): <http://www.ksu.edu/academicservices/fhbook/fhsecc.html>
- University handbook appendix Q: Guidelines for evaluating faculty and unclassified professionals: <http://www.ksu.edu/academicservices/fhbook/fhxq.html>

## **SUMMARY**

Essentially, the administrative evaluation process begins with a clearly defined purpose and the acceptance of the campus community. It is imperative that the campus culture and environment accept the concept of administrative evaluations as a means to improve administrative performance, detect any problems in the department climate, or as a good decision-making tool.

A central administrative unit needs to be designated as the office to administer, monitor, and compile the results. This office should have a proven record for integrity and confidentiality. In addition, an

efficient evaluation process with an agreed-upon timeline would assist in ensuring accuracy, support, and results provided to the appropriate people in a timely manner.

As with all processes and working with several groups, good communication is a vital means for survival. Once there is a void in communication, a domino effect occurs which erodes the integrity of the central office administrating the evaluation and the purpose behind the evaluation process.

Maintaining confidentiality is most important. As it is with communication, once this is lost, it is very difficult to regain the trust and confidence of the campus faculty and staff.

In conclusion, one clear and present part of evaluations is that most people do not want to be evaluated and do not like to provide evaluations. For many administrators, evaluations are the most odious task, and it would be shortsighted to think that the process is enjoyable. However, with a clear purpose, efficient process, and confidentiality, the evaluation process for administrators can be seamless and becomes a part of the culture.

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