

Faculty Evaluation of Administrators

A Report by the Governance Committee
Of the SUNY University Faculty Senate
Presented to the Winter Plenary
2005

Scope of the Report

This report draws primarily on resources from within SUNY, readily available information from the work of the Governance Committee, from campus bylaws and governance websites, and system documents. Other sources include interviews and written exchanges with SUNY faculty and staff at selected campuses where faculty evaluation of administrators has been taking place on a regular basis or at least sporadically, but no attempt has been made to contact *every* SUNY unit. The objective is to identify what works and has worked best within these existing evaluations. As explained below, the primary emphasis of this report is on faculty evaluation of administrators *below the level of campus president*.

Rationale

Over at least the last decade, a movement towards greater accountability and transparency has occurred in higher education as elsewhere, and faculty evaluation of administrators is one response to this increased expectation. To state the obvious, evaluation of job performance exists throughout institutions of higher learning: faculty evaluate student performance, faculty themselves generally invite student evaluations and are themselves subject to rigorous peer and institutional review for tenure, promotion, and merit awards, and the SUNY Chancellor (see below) institutes regular evaluation of campus presidents. Faculty evaluation of senior administration should not be confused with “line review” performed within administration itself, nor should “line review” be used to foreclose faculty evaluation of administration. Often while “line review” involves some faculty input, the faculty does not initiate the process, it usually does not participate broadly, nor does it have “ownership” of the process.

The Chancellor’s Review Cycle of SUNY College Presidents

The Chancellor has initiated a regular review of campus presidents. But because initiation and “ownership” of the process does not specifically reside with local faculty, we have regarded it as outside the scope of this report. The Chancellor’s review is described in “Guidelines for Presidential Reviews & Evaluations at State-Operated Campuses.” This document describes an annual review process that does not require a

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faculty role and a periodic full scale formal evaluation, typically at the three year point (new presidents) or at five years (continuing presidents) which does solicit faculty involvement. A “senior faculty member” may be invited to serve on the Evaluation Team and the Chancellor “will invite...governance leaders...to submit written comments on the quality of the President’s stewardship” but the “Guidelines” do not stipulate campus-wide faculty input, though in practice this seems to have occurred at most campuses where the formal review has taken place. The “Guidelines” also require that “requests for comments regarding Presidential stewardship shall be considered confidential.”

Results of Governance Committee Survey

In the academic year 2002-3, the Governance Committee conducted a survey of 27 SUNY campuses to determine the extent to which these campuses had procedures in place for faculty to evaluate senior administrators (dean and above). Of the 24 campuses responding, just over half indicated that guidelines for evaluation were “in place,” but a large majority of campuses reported that there was “little or no role for faculty governance in evaluation of senior administrators,” which is consistent with the findings of this report that while guidelines may be in place, they are often not implemented on a regular basis or at all. The Governance Committee Survey noted that “The key factor in determining whether faculty at an institution has a meaningful role seems to be the sense that the faculty has of itself.” Campuses that have a strong faculty culture which values independence and stewardship are more likely to press for a faculty prerogative to evaluate administration.

General Observations

Evaluation of administrators by faculty works best when all parties involved consider it an attempt to improve the health and strength of the institution rather than targeting individuals. While administrators under review may not always be eager to embrace evaluation, they will accept it more readily when they perceive that the process is being administered fairly and that results generated are used to improve job performance. (At least one SUNY institution solicits a faculty recommendation for or against an administrator’s retention, but this is the exception rather than the rule.)

Because administrative evaluation is a sporadic process often performed by ad hoc committees monitored by frequently-shifting governance leadership, it is important to ground the process in campus bylaws or a similar document and to make the process as streamlined and minimally onerous as possible. In practice, some campus bylaws specify a general expectation and a process for administrative evaluation, leaving it to evaluation committees to generate the details, while other bylaws are quite full and prescriptive. But the important point is that there is a written, mutually-agreed on process in place.

Oversight

It is most important that the practice of faculty evaluation of administrators be monitored by an individual or individuals who is not a member of the evaluating committee and who is directly answerable to the faculty and professional staff and ultimately to the larger college community. In practice this is typically the campus governance leader working in cooperation with the governance executive committee. While generally not participating in the evaluation, these individuals will typically initiate the evaluation of specific individuals on a regular basis as determined by the faculty bylaws and will provide oversight for the process.

The Evaluation Committee

In practice the size and composition of the evaluation committee vary considerably according to the size and complexity of the campus. Some variations include an evaluation committee which reproduces the representation of the *search committee* for the position under review. A more comprehensive model designates an evaluation coordinator for the entire campus with small, individual committees for each division or school. The campus representing this model produces a comprehensive review of university programs and services and *all* senior administrators on a biennial basis. Another model establishes a coordinating committee overseeing departmental evaluation committees which do the actual evaluation and then report back to the coordinating committee. But a common feature of all evaluation committees is that they represent all sectors affected by the policy and decisions of the individual under review. Generally evaluation committees are elected, but in some instances they are appointed by the CGL alone or consulting with the local senate executive committee.

The Evaluation Cycle

Most bylaws or governing documents specify that senior administrators be evaluated every three to five years. (Although one campus is attempting biannual or even annual evaluations of all senior administrators.) However, it is increasing practice that senior administration positions are filled as interim appointments which are typically not evaluated. Additionally, administrative terms are often shorter than previously because of increasing mobility and volatility in higher educational administration. Both realities often delay and complicate faculty evaluation. One suggestion is to move up the first evaluation to, for example, the second year of service. It has been noted that new faculty are typically reviewed in their *first* year of performance, with the information then available. The goal is that evaluation occur in a timely way to affect and enhance individual and institutional performance.

Initiating Evaluation

In practical terms, this is one of the greatest obstacles to faculty evaluation of administrators. While bylaws may require the process to take place, an individual or individuals needs to initiate the process. Governance leadership changes, often frequently; no formal training for the position of CGL takes place, and knowledge of policy and governance documents varies considerably from individual to individual and often takes time to acquire. Additionally, different “leadership styles” prevail and often if the CGL perceives resistance to faculty evaluation from the college administration, the easiest course is to simply ignore or defer the practice. There is no easy solution to this problem, but one campus has a published record of the evaluation cycle, and the *governance secretary* simply informs all parties at the beginning of the academic year that a review is required for specific individuals.

The Evaluation “Instrument”

In practice, survey instruments vary as much as the composition of the evaluation committee. Standard evaluation formats are available (see D. Sharon Miller et al. following), and they invite respondents to rate job performance according to key categories such as “communication skills,” “leadership,” “organizational skills” etc. Others are highly particularized for aspects of job performance that are specific to a particular position and may not apply to all administrative positions (i.e. “purchasing of equipment and supplies”). The advantage of a standard form is that it requires less of the evaluation committees and therefore makes it more likely that the process will be accomplished, but it will also yield less precise information about performance. One campus includes a standard evaluation instrument on its governance webpage, with the invitation that specific committees adapt or modify it as necessary. Most instruments examined invite a combination of quantified and written responses. Increasingly, surveys are web-based with obvious advantages in respect to collection of information. However some caveats apply: safeguards need to be put in place to prevent multiple responses from a single individual. Procedures need to be established to ensure that only members of the evaluation committee have access to the collected information.

Dissemination on Information Collected

Typically, the evaluation committee will have received supporting documentation from the individual being evaluated, which it will take into account in preparing its report. The evaluation committee is also responsible for tabulating quantifiable results and editing prose comments to remove potentially scurrilous responses. What happens after this point varies considerably. In some instances, only the committee, the individual evaluated and his or her immediate supervisor see the survey data. In other cases, a summary is presented to the CGL and the executive committee; it may also be placed in a public place such as the campus library. Before the summary is prepared, the individual evaluated may have the opportunity to respond in writing to the results of the

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survey, and these comments may be acknowledged in the committee report. At one campus, the tabulated responses and edited, selected prose comments are placed on the restricted campus website for all members of the university community to access

Whatever method of dissemination is employed is obviously a function of local practice and negotiation, but where faculty and professional staff see none of the results of the evaluations, a sense of mistrust and futility may result. Consequently, it is recommended that individuals participating in the survey have access to *some version* of the results, even if it is only an edited summary.

Conclusion

The opportunity to evaluate senior college administrators is an important faculty prerogative, which, if pursued carefully, can give faculty a stronger sense of participation in the governance of the college. The first step in establishing the process as a regular feature of academic practice is to convince all parties, administrators and faculty alike, that the goal, beyond the personalities involved, is finally institutional improvement, and that the considerable work involved for faculty is worth undertaking. The University Faculty Senate can take on an important role in affirming the importance of faculty evaluation of administrators by encouraging Campus Governance Leaders to revisit mechanisms for evaluation which may already be in place at their campuses, or where none exist, to examine the practices at those campuses which are successfully accomplishing this goal and, as necessary, adapt them to their own needs.

**Faculty Evaluation of Academic Administrators, a Brief List of Resources
January 2005**

Foundation documents

American Association of University Professors. “Statement of Government of Colleges and Universities,” 1966.

<http://www.aaup.org/governance/index.htm>

----- “Evaluation of Administrators.” (AAUP Policy documents and reports, 1984) as displayed on the Canadian Organization of Faculty Association Staff’s website.

<http://www.caut.ca/cuasa/cofas/Documents/aaup-admin-eval.html>

Miller, D. Sharon et al. “Evaluating Administrators: Designing the Process in a Shared Governance Environment.” Washington, D.C.: Annual International Conference of the League for Innovation, 1993. ERIC ED361 047.

This substantial 81 page document “provides guidelines and sample forms and instruments to help in the development of a system for evaluating community college administrators.” Included is a sample evaluation instrument which has been adapted by SUNY Binghamton and can be found online at:

<http://faculty senate.binghamton.edu/completeECCchargeandprocedures.htm>

State University of New York. Office of the Chancellor. “Guidelines for Presidential Reviews & Evaluations at State-Operated Campuses,” n.d.

----- “Policies of the Board of Trustees, 2001, Article VI (University Faculty) Section 3 (Responsibilities).”

http://www.suny.edu/Board_of_Trustees/PDF/Policies.pdf

University Faculty Senate Governance Committee. “Role of Faculty in Evaluation of Senior Administrators at SUNY Campuses.” Survey conducted by a subcommittee of the SUNY Faculty Senate Governance Committee 2002-3.

Journal articles

Heck, Ronald et al. “Administrative effectiveness in higher education: improving assessment procedures.” *Research in Higher Education*. 41.6 (2000): 663-684.

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Lasley, T.J and Haberman, M. “How do university administrators evaluate deans?” *Journal of Teacher Education*. 38.5 (1987): 13-16.

Matczinski, T. “The deanship: how faculty evaluate performance.” *Journal of Teacher Education*. 40.6 (1989): 10-14.

Rosser, Vicki J. et al. “Academic deans and directors: assessing their effectiveness from individual and institutional perspectives.” *Journal of Higher Education*. 74.1 (2003): 1-25.

http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_higher_education/v074/74.1.rosser.pdf

Websites

American Association of University Professors. <http://www.aup.org/>

Canadian Organization of Faculty Association Staff.

<http://www.caut.ca/cuasa/cofas/>, especially its Document Archive which contains links to policy and procedure documents from selected academic institutions

<http://www.caut.ca/cuasa/cofas/Documents/index.html>

SUNY Campuses which conduct regular faculty evaluation of administrators.

This list is *not intended to be exhaustive*, and the Governance Committee solicits information from other SUNY campuses which engage in regular evaluation or which have policy / procedures in place that may be helpful to other SUNY units:

SUNY Binghamton
SUNY Fredonia
SUNY New Paltz
SUNY Stonybrook

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