

Recommendations of the Faculty Evaluation Task Force (2013) of the Academic Senate

The background of the task force is provided in Appendix I. This report doesn't deal with the whole subject of faculty evaluation, but focuses on the matters raised by members of the task force, prior working group, and chairs of faculty councils.

Recommendations

1) GOALS.

Central goals of annual merit review are to recognize and reward high performance, and to identify low performance so it can be responded to. Annual merit reviews can also be formative evaluations and part of the ongoing process of mentoring.

High performance is vital for the faculty to meet our collective goals of excellence for our units and our research university. Continued low performance cheats other colleagues who are doing their jobs. Hence, those whose research, scholarship or creative work contributes to meeting our aspirations deserve to be rewarded and those whose performance is substantially below their colleagues in the unit should be identified for special attention. The university provides several avenues to recognize contributions and the university policy on Individual Development Plans provides a model for constructive response to low performance.

2) OUTCOME.

- a) The final outcome of annual merit review – including research/scholarship/creative endeavors, teaching, and service – should be conveyed to each faculty member in words instead of being conveyed to the individual as a quantitative score. What should be conveyed to the individual is a nuanced message rather than a single word or phrase. (Of course, administrative records can, for convenience, translate the rating into a number.)
- b) The following five categories are recommended: Outstanding, excellent, meritorious, would benefit from improvement, and not satisfactory. Schools may use a different vocabulary if they wish.

3) COMMUNICATION.

- a) The dean or delegate of the dean (for example, a vice or associate dean or other suitable representative; in larger schools, a unit's chair or a section head or other suitable representative) should be required to hold a one-on-one meeting with each faculty member to discuss/explain the results of evaluations either annually, or in each year that there is an in-depth evaluation.
- b) Results of evaluations and raw data must be kept for 3-4 years, especially for junior and new faculty; for tenure-track assistant professors, the results and raw data are needed until the tenure decision process is complete.

4) SPECTRUM OF DISTRIBUTION.

Adoption of these categories should be accompanied by development of school-by-school guidelines to determine the criteria for each category, using global/national standards of excellence in the discipline.

- a) These standards should replace any prior policy or practice that forces a fixed distribution of faculty in a school or subdivision of a school over all five categories (for example, the distribution should not be required to fit a bell-curve or any particular value of standard deviation). But it is not a good practice to give more than half the faculty in the unit exactly the same rating (the existing University policy does not permit that; see Appendix IV), as that would not capture the variation in performance that always exists. As the University policy says, "Each department's evaluations must yield a spectrum of distribution."
- b) The individual's effort profile should be taken into account in assigning ratings.
- c) Those who are performing above or below their colleagues in the unit will fit the categories of excellent or would benefit by improvement.

- d) Those who are performing substantially above their colleagues in the unit in scholarship/research/creative work should be considered for special recognition and reward. Similarly, those NTT teaching faculty, or tenured faculty on teaching profiles, who are performing substantially above their colleagues in the unit on teaching should be considered for special recognition and reward. On the other hand, those who are performing substantially below their colleagues in the unit in either teaching or scholarship should be identified for special attention.
- e) The categories of outstanding and not satisfactory are for outliers, by the standards of that unit. The university policy on evaluations gives this example, “The highest rating must be reserved for work meeting the highest aspirations of the school and the department, which should be calibrated to national standards through measurable indicia. (E.g. publication in the top journals in the field, of a quality and at a rate of productivity which would be outstanding even in the top [5]-[15] departments in the field.)” As noted above, we recommend that global standards be used as well as national.

5) TIMING.

- a) To avoid undue lag, the year (or multiyear period) evaluated should, to the extent administratively practicable, be the period just before the annual salary setting. In addition, the individual’s cumulative contributions should be taken into account.
- b) Under existing University policy, each school is allowed to decide whether to hold an in-depth evaluation every two or three years, or a streamlined evaluation every year, or a combination. Thus, a school is allowed to conduct an in-depth evaluation for one-third of its faculty every three years. If a school adopts such a practice, then the following points (i.e., points c, d, and e) should be considered.
- c) For some faculty, it is useful to hold in-depth evaluation every year. In particular, annual in-depth evaluations must be required for every tenure-track assistant professor and for every NTT faculty during her/his early years of appointment (generally, the first three years). Also, for a particular faculty member, a dean or a unit chair must be able to request an additional in-depth evaluation during any year between consecutive in-depth evaluations. Likewise, an individual faculty member must be allowed to request an additional in-depth evaluation during any year between consecutive in-depth evaluations.
- d) For a faculty member undergoing an in-depth evaluation once every three years, all activities and outcomes for the three years must be considered during evaluation, along with the individual’s cumulative contribution. Also, the evaluation scores must be used for the next three years.
- e) For every faculty member undergoing an in-depth evaluation every three years, the in-depth evaluations may be supplemented by streamlined evaluations in the two interim years. If such an approach is adopted, then during the two years between in-depth evaluations, the scores of the previous in-depth evaluations may be adjusted slightly based on the interim streamlined evaluations.

6) PROCESS.

It is recommended that the annual evaluations be done by elected faculty committees, allowing local variations as provided by existing University policy.

- a) As the policy also requires, each school should have a process and timeline for the faculty member to appeal to the dean to reconsider an evaluation. A school committee should advise the dean on appeals.
- b) Faculty should submit annual activity reports (or updated CVs, instead of or in addition to reports, as the school prefers) by the school deadline, whether or not they are to be evaluated that year. This provides an opportunity for feedback from the dean or dean’s delegate on work that is appreciably above or below usual expectations.

7) SCHOLARSHIP.

Evaluation of research/scholarship/creative work is of fundamental importance to the university. Committees should consider *productivity, quality, and impact*. As the University policy on

evaluation says, “The focus of the inquiry should be excellence and creativity and whether the individual has brought new insights, and has made or is likely to make a real impact.”

- a) In the overall process of evaluation of research/scholarship/creative work, quantitative measures should be used as a starting point by triggering subsequent in-depth evaluations – especially for faculty who receive very low or very high scores – via scrutiny of additional material.
- b) The UCAPT Manual gives guidance on evaluation of scholarship that should be looked to by school merit committees (though letters from outside referees are not generally used in annual evaluation). Among other things, the UCAPT Manual says:

The University values scholars who have made important and original contributions, who have had an impact on the field, and whose work shows a clear arc of intellectual and creative development.

A candidate’s scholarly or artistic work should be widely perceived among peers as outstanding and should be instrumental in advancing the academic needs of his or her unit. This can be demonstrated, for example, by the quality and selectivity of the candidate’s publication venues, performance venues, and grant sources. The candidate should be recognized in the field through conferences, study sections, invited talks, shows, performances, editorial boards, and the like, as appropriate for the discipline. Citation counts, and variants such as the h-index, are crude metrics, which should be supplemented by analysis of how and why the work is cited. In artistic fields, the candidate’s creative products should gain recognition equivalent to the expectations of scholarship in other disciplines. (Section 1.1)

- c) Evaluation of the research/ scholarship/ creative work of tenure-track, tenured and NTT research faculty deals with the most crucial part of their work, which receives the heaviest weight in any evaluation. This is vital in a research university, and is essential if USC and our academic units are to achieve our ambitious goals. Evaluation of scholarship is so important that it deserves further in-depth attention by other bodies (such as UCAPT, the Research Committee, or a special task force).

8) TEACHING.

Evaluation of teaching: The task force members believe that evaluation of teaching is particularly weak in most schools and hence paid special attention to this and made several recommendations. The UCAPT Manual also has important suggestions on the evaluation of teaching effectiveness; excerpts are attached as Appendix V.

- a) The purpose of evaluation of teaching should span the following.
 - i) Acknowledge and reward high-quality teaching.
 - ii) Provide constructive feedback for improving teaching quality.
- b) The task force made these recommendations related to student evaluations of teaching.
 - i) The survey used to gather student evaluation of teaching should include a question that asks students to provide a self-assessment regarding their ability to perform tasks stated in the course learning outcomes.
 - ii) If practicable, student evaluations of teaching should be conducted such that the scores can be separated into categories based on students’ grades (expected or actual). However, this must be done in a manner that does not compromise students’ anonymity.
 - iii) If practicable, scores of student evaluations of teaching for different types of courses – e.g., required vs. electives, small vs. medium vs. large enrollments, undergraduate vs. graduate – should be treated differently.
 - iv) To help the individual calibrate, the scores reported to each faculty member should also include for each item the unit’s average score (or the average score for that type of course) and the percentage of the enrolled students who participated in the evaluation.
 - v) We recommend that the annual evaluation of a faculty member’s teaching should not be based on the scores of student evaluations of teaching. See paragraph (d) for how we recommend student scores should be used. The school’s evaluation of teaching should instead

- capture matters that are more informative about teaching effectiveness: (I) measures of student learning, including long-term effect of a teacher on her/his students; (II) use of research-based pedagogical strategies; and (III) the results of peer observation. See the following paragraphs (c) through (f).
- c) The following information must also be used as a part of evaluation of teaching.
 - i) Pedagogical innovations, use of research-based pedagogical strategies, and efforts to bring current professional practice into the classroom.
 - ii) Curriculum development and evaluation of the syllabus or course materials the teacher has prepared.
 - iii) Textbooks written, teaching related publications and grants, and so on.
 - iv) For faculty active in research/scholarship/creative work, educating graduate students during one-on-one meetings, research group meetings, work on scholarly publications or creative work as a co-author with students, etc., should be considered as a component of evaluation of teaching.
 - d) In the overall process of evaluation of teaching, student evaluation scores can be used as a starting point by triggering subsequent in-depth evaluations – especially for faculty who receive very low or very high scores – via scrutiny of additional material that is already available/provided or specially requested, particularly the following.
 - i) Review of comments written by students as a part of student evaluations of teaching, particularly those identifying strong and weak points of the process of teaching.
 - ii) Review of teaching portfolios specially requested from faculty, including detailed syllabi, assignments, solutions, and samples of student work (worst, average, and best).
 - iii) In some cases, the evaluation committee may gather additional information from a randomly selected set of students or from observation of classroom teaching.
 - e) Peer evaluation of teaching can provide constructive feedback for improving teaching, in terms of the content as well as the process of teaching. However, it is time-consuming. Hence, we should use it in the following ways.
 - i) Use in the early stages of a faculty member’s career to maximize its benefits.
 - ii) Use as part of the tenure evaluation process, as required by the UCAPT Manual.
 - iii) Use whenever a faculty member requests feedback.
 - iv) Use whenever annual evaluation of a faculty member’s teaching shows need for improvement.
 - f) Exit interviews of graduating students and/or periodic focus groups of students, particularly those near the end of their programs or recent graduates or other alumni, should be carried out to gather feedback about contents and sequencing of courses. These are also likely to provide information about individual instructors, particularly the strongest and the weakest ones.

9) MENTORING.

The Faculty Handbook recognizes the importance of mentoring of students and junior colleagues. Evaluation should recognize this activity as a part of teaching or a part of scholarship. Or a school could choose to evaluate mentoring as a separate category. The USC Mellon Mentoring Program states USC’s commitment to mentoring.

USC has a mission of encouraging the role of mentoring throughout our academic community and believes in fostering those faculty members who:

- *Demonstrate long term commitments to mentoring faculty, graduate students, or undergraduate students at USC.*
- *Offer sound counsel and valuable information to their mentees in order to advance and develop the mentee’s own path to academic, research and professional success.*
- *Sponsor students and colleagues so that they are recognized at appropriate points in their careers and are positioned for continued excellence in scholarship, research and teaching.*
- *Generously share their time and expertise in critiquing their mentee’s work.*

- *Help to create a vital and engaged academic community in their school and at USC.*
- *Serve as role models for their colleagues by maintaining high standards for excellence within their own discipline and at the level of the larger University.*

10) SERVICE:

Routine internal and external service is expected of all faculty with diminished expectations for tenure track assistant professors. Outliers, whether positive or negative, should impact overall evaluation.

11) RELATION TO THE TENURE DECISIONS, AND OTHER EVALUATIONS.

Evaluations for tenure and promotion, or for reappointment or non-reappointment of untenured faculty members, differ from annual merit reviews in several ways and are never just a cumulative reflection of annual evaluations. It may happen that annual reviews do not mention or even consider long term contributions or problems, which properly must be considered for these important decisions. The criteria and process for tenure and tenure-track promotion are discussed in the UCAPT Manual. For tenure-track assistant professors, as the UCAPT Manual says, there is a particularly thorough review midway through the probationary period that evaluates whether the individual is making sufficient progress toward tenure. In particular, UCAPT Manual says “Schools are asked to consider the question of non-reappointment especially carefully at the mid-probationary period review, as well as in the year before the tenure decision.”

School guidelines approved by the Provost discuss criteria and process for NTT promotion. Decisions on reappointment or non-reappointment of tenure-track assistant professors, and NTT faculty, follow applicable provisions of the Faculty Handbook and properly consider all the relevant criteria similar to those considered in appointment decisions.

The appendixes to this report are (I) background for this task force, (II) the report of the previous working group, (III) a questionnaire, (IV) the university policy on evaluation of faculty, which was the product of a joint committee and extensive consideration by the Academic Senate, and (V) excerpts from the UCAPT Manual on evaluation of teaching.

APPENDIX I. BACKGROUND

During the 2011-2012 academic year, a meeting of the chairs of faculty councils with then Senate President Sandeep Gupta identified the process of annual faculty evaluation as an important topic for the Academic Senate to review and make recommendations for improvements. Subsequently, the Senate President prepared a questionnaire and gathered inputs from the chairs of faculty councils. A working group of Senate members from various schools – Nasrin Bahari Chopiuki (Ostrow), Lucinda Carver (Thornton), Jeremy Kagan (Cinematic Arts), Kevin Murphy (Marshall), John Silvester (Viterbi), and James Steele (Architecture) – met and discussed these questionnaire responses as well as their knowledge of practices in their schools and prepared the enclosed memo that captured their consensus view about annual faculty evaluations (see Appendix II).

During the August 2012 Planning Meeting of the Academic Senate, a session was devoted to this topic and Senate President Patricia Riley formed this task force. The task force chair requested Rebecca Lonergan, the Chair of the Senate Committee on NTT Faculty Affairs (CNTTFA), to suggest names of CNTTFA members to join the effort. The task force included Kathy Besinque (Pharmacy), Lucinda Carver (Thornton), Jucheng Chen (Ostrow), Ginger Clark (Rossier), Chuck Gomer (Keck), Jim Gosline (Marshall), Sandeep Gupta (Viterbi; Task Force Chair), Jeremy Kagan (Cinematic Arts), Martin Levine (Law, representing the Provost's Office), Win May (Keck), Edwin McCann (Dornsife), Kevin Murphy (Marshall), Mihailo Trifunac (Viterbi), and Doni Whitsett (Social Work).

In addition to the discussions during two task force meetings, task force members completed a questionnaire prepared by the chair (see Appendix III). Subsequently, a draft report was circulated to all members and their further suggestions and questions were used to arrive at these recommendations to the Academic Senate.

At the request of the 2013-14 Senate President, Charles Gomer, this report was presented at the August 2013 Planning Meeting of the Academic Senate. Subsequently, this report was presented at the December 2013 meeting of the Academic Senate and revised to incorporate the feedback.