FACULTY EVALUATION

The following papers were presented on October 14, 1977 at an administrator's session at the 74th annual meeting of the American Society for Horticultural Science, Salt Lake City, Utah. Clyde C. Singletary, Mississippi State University, presided.

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FACULTY EVALUATION: A DEAN'S PERCEPTION

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I view faculty evaluations from two perspectives – the ideal and the pragmatic. From the ideal perspective, we recognize that an individual's innate capabilities span the whole range from high to low and that each can be positively motivated by setting individual objectives. We use faculty evaluations to stretch each person's individual capabilities and create an environment in which an individual can reach his or her maximum potential. It is hoped that this positive motivation will result in increased productivity that will benefit both the individual and the University. From a pragmatic perspective, faculty evaluations provide the information needed to determine eligibility for promotions and merit increases within the ranks.

Two or more levels of input are required in the decision-making process, particularly for promotions. One, and certainly the most important, is at the departmental level. Here is where the most accurate evaluation of an individual's performance can be made. Peers who are in day-to-day contact with the faculty member's teaching, research, and public service activities are in the best position to evaluate his or her performance. The department chair is the one person who is probably best aware of all the faculty members' responsibilities or assignments including work on committees, commodity groups, special projects, etc. He also is the one who has the responsibility of presenting the judgment of the departmental peers and his own judgment in the letter of recommendation and documentation that will be reviewed at the college and university level. This letter, and how well it is written, is of key importance. There were times when I almost felt that it was the department chair's creative writing ability that was being judged rather than an individual faculty member's performance. That of course is an overstatement, but it does stress the point that the chair's letter of recommendation is vitally important. In the University of California, it is now

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required that the departmental faculty or a committee within the department review the chair's letter before it is forwarded to the Dean to insure that the letter represents the collective judgment of the faculty equal to or senior to the faculty person being evaluated. The faculty member also is given a summary of the letter of recommendation and has an opportunity to write a letter of rejoinder if he disagrees. Submitted with the letter of recommendation are student evaluations of the faculty member's teaching ability, a list of publications, statements of university and public service, and letters of recommendation. After the departmental evaluation and a vote of the faculty, there is a college level evaluation. At University of California, Davis (UCD) the form of this evaluation varies with the nature of the personnel action.

Promotion recommendations

If it is a promotion, the recommendation is reviewed by the Associate Deans and the Dean. The Associate Dean and Dean then write their own letter of recommendation giving a Collegewide perspective. The purpose is to establish a College standard of quality, recognizing that there is a possibility that a department chair might take an advocate's role rather than being completely objective. It also is an opportunity for the Dean to recognize contributions that a faculty member has made to the College which a department may not feel to be particularly important such as service on a Dean's committee. It also is an opportunity to recognize research that is inter- or multidisciplinary or mission oriented. The peer review system tends to favor work done by sole authors, because it is easier to evaluate those who had the greatest or the most creative input, and research published in refereed, discipline-based journals. The Dean has an opportunity to balance these biases by pointing out the significance of team research and why a publication in *HortScience or California Agriculture* is just as significant to the mission of the College and Experiment Station as a publication in *Plant Physiology or Science*.

The promotion recommendation then moves on to the Committee on Academic Personnel, formerly known as the Budget Committee. The Committee is a group of 6 faculty appointed for 1-2 year terms by the Committee on Committees representing the major units of the campus. The main purpose of this committee is to provide a campuswide standard of excellence and to balance the input of deans and department chairs, and to advise the Chancellor who has the responsibility for the final decision. The Committee on Academic Personnel appoints a confidential *ad hoc* committee to review the promotion recommendation and accompanying materials. One or two of the four members of the committee are drawn from the faculty member's department and the others are from departments which represent disciplines related to the faculty member's field of research and teaching. They study the promotion materials in detail, including reading research publications and the student evaluations of the faculty member's teaching. A detailed report of the *ad hoc* committee's evaluation is sent to the Committee on Academic Personnel which then makes a recommendation to the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs. If the recommendation is different from that of the Dean or Department, the Dean receives a notice of tentative overrule along with a copy of the *ad hoc* report. After consultation with the department chair, he may choose to challenge the recommendation. The process starts in November and is generally completed by June, unless of course, the faculty member wishes to appeal an unfavorable decision.

In addition to promotion actions at Davis, we also have merit actions. Each faculty member is reviewed every two years for a possible merit increase. The increase, ranging from $700 up to $3,200, depending upon rank, is in addition to cost of living increases which are given to all faculty. A merit increase begins in the same manner as a promotion. The faculty member's publications, teaching evaluations, and record of service are reviewed by the departmental faculty and a vote is taken. The department chair writes the letter of recom-

Worth of system

The question is: Is it worth it? The answer by most faculty and administrators at UCD would be: Yes. They believe the system of evaluation insures that a high-quality faculty is recruited and retained at the University and that the faculty has maximum incentive to remain productive, or to put it another way, reach their full potential. The system is extremely fair. There are so many checks and balances that it would be very difficult for any one person to block a promotion or merit which was deserved or to accelerate someone who did not deserve promotion. The system also insures that a faculty member knows where he or she stands in the eyes of his or her colleagues. The process also keeps a fairly large percentage of the faculty and the administration informed about what is going on — who is doing good and interesting work — and this awareness provides the opportunity for collaborative work.

There are also disadvantages, particularly for a mission-oriented College. The system favors independent research in peer reviewed journals. Young faculty members soon recognize that the main road to survival in the UC system is paved with numbers of good publications in prestige journals. Second, is good teaching evaluations and third, sometimes a distant third, is University and public service. As a result, it is sometimes hard and even questionable to get young faculty involved in mission-oriented research that may not be published in the discipline journals or to serve on committees. I do not deny that there can be high quality applied research, but there are often problems to be solved in agriculture which go without solution because the faculty is not willing to invest the time in them. As I mentioned earlier, the same problem exists with multi- or interdisciplinary research. We all recognize that the problems which face us in agriculture today are complex. We are dealing with biological systems that must be viewed as a whole as well as from individual components or disciplines. Unfortunately, the peer review system works against the team approach because of multiple authors and because the results of the research may be published in interdisciplinary journals not recognized by colleagues who have remained in a "pure" discipline. The Dean can have some influence here — particularly in merit actions — but the faculty committees play a major role in the promotion decisions.

Time required

A final disadvantage is the major investment of time in the faculty evaluation and the stress under which faculty operate. I guess that is the trade-off for having a good faculty who are highly motivated and reaching maximum potential. As I have mentioned, the general reaction of faculty and administration is that the peer review system of faculty evaluation has more benefits than disadvantages and that the result is an excellent and productive faculty.

We hope to fine-tune faculty evaluations to be more responsive to mission-oriented, multidiscipline research and public service. There is some progress in that direction and if we can achieve more recognition in the above areas, I feel the system will be both ideally and pragmatically a good system of faculty evaluation.