

FORWARD

Five common errors of evaluation:

1. **Overly positive evaluations** occur because some chair/heads can't bear to offer criticism and others hope that a very positive performance evaluation might motivate the faculty member to perform better. This strategy is ineffective because it does nothing to help the faculty member understand what's needed to meet the desired goals. Even effective new faculty members need the direction and support that comes from an evaluation tied to performance criteria in order to help them extend and continue excellent performance. Furthermore, if department needs to not extend a probationary contract due to poor performance, there will not be adequate documentation to support such a choice.
2. **Overly critical evaluations.** Some chairs use performance negative evaluations to "squeeze out" a faculty member. When this occurs, performance is not usually the real reason for the termination. Performance evaluations should be used only to evaluate real performance based upon stated expectations.
3. **Uniformly neutral evaluations.** Some chair/heads give everyone a neutral performance evaluation, often simply a description of activities based upon the faculty member's own activity report. This happens for several reasons: Laziness on the part of the evaluator, lack of documentation of the employee's performance and therefore lack of substantial information about the employee's performance or discomfort in delivering "bad news." Descriptive evaluations provide no benefit to either the faculty member or the institution.
4. **Single event evaluations.** Some chair/heads have a tendency to evaluate employees based on a single event that occurred during the review period. This may result in an overly positive evaluation (for a faculty member who lands a major grant but has generally poor teaching or service), or an overly negative evaluation (for a faculty member who had a major error but normally performed very well during the year).
5. **Most recent event evaluations.** When faculty members anticipate the annual review, performance tends to improve. Be sure to keep good performance documentation throughout the year and evaluate performance based upon the entire year's work.

Tips for writing stronger evaluations

1. **Communicate the expectations.** Make sure you begin with a clear letter of appointment, as well as a job description that is reviewed annually. It isn't possible to evaluate performance unless expectations have been established ahead of time.
2. **Observe and document performance all year.** Chair/heads must assure that faculty members job performance is observed and documented on an on-going basis. This means making sure peer review of teaching occurs in your department, that you encourage faculty to take advantage of opportunities for professional development, and that you review SROI's, teaching evaluations, etc. with faculty members. Because no one can remember all of the events that occur with each faculty member during an entire year, you need to document these interactions. Complete documentation helps the evaluator to recall the events that occurred throughout the year so that the annual evaluation may be based on documented evidence of performance.
3. **Give warnings and counseling when needed.** Don't wait until the annual evaluation to tell a faculty member about a performance problem. If you see a pattern of performance or conduct problems, you need to discuss with the faculty member and explain the need for improvement.
4. **Review all available documentation.** Before the annual evaluation, review all available performance documentation, not only the faculty activity report. The more complete the documentation, the more accurate and objective the performance evaluation will be.
5. **Write your letter based upon performance criteria.** The letter should be compliant with policy, and should reflect the how well the faculty member is meeting pre-established expectations and moving toward tenure and/or promotion.
6. **Be specific.** During the evaluation, discuss specific way in which performance and conduct do not meet expectations, meet expectations, or exceed expectations. State specifically what the

faculty member needs to do to improve (even when providing praise) and offer the faculty member suggestions as to how he or she may go about improving. Set a time frame for achieving goals as well as follow up meeting dates if necessary.

7. **Stress the need to improve.** Areas for improvement generally fall into one of three categories: 1) a need for immediate improvement to salvage the job, 2) a need for improvement to help the faculty member perform at a higher level, or 3) suggestions to help the faculty member perform even better so that he or she may be promoted or in other ways meet important career goals. High priority items should be given a specific time frame for improvement with plans to review the performance at some time in the near future.
8. **Give the employee his or her turn.** Meet with each faculty member to discuss his or her goals, and strategies for meeting those goals. During that meeting, ask the faculty member to discuss his or her own self-evaluation and to respond to the your evaluation. Allow the employee to explain any discrepancies in the evaluation. Be sure to document employee comments in the personnel file, as well as encourage faculty to make sure annual evaluations are accurate, fair, and helpful.
9. **Summarize the evaluation.** Make sure that the faculty member fully understands what was discussed in the evaluation, what is expected, and consequences for not meeting the goals. An employee should never leave an evaluation with a feeling of uncertainty.
10. **Be candid, be constructive, be caring, and be clear.** The goal of annual reviews is to encourage faculty toward greater success and to help struggling faculty succeed. The cost to the institution of hiring and losing faculty is too great to not make the evaluation process one of developing the best faculty possible in your unit.

A few additional suggestions for administrators/PTE committees:

1. Make sure advice and criticisms are directed to appropriate parties. For example, if the department does not have a functioning peer review system, do not blame the candidate. Notify the chair/head of the need for better documentation; if the department is not providing annual evaluations, this is not the candidate's fault, and criticism must be directed toward the department chair/head. The candidate's letters ought not be filled with criticisms directed to other administrators.
2. Clarify job descriptions and promotion and tenure materials with faculty, with PTE committees, etc. Make sure discussions are frank and all members are operating from the same understandings, in so far as possible.
3. Don't neglect opportunities to promote balance, and don't criticize faculty members for doing what they have been asked to do: service on department committees, service appointed by other administrators.
4. Evaluate service; don't simply list it. Effective service (with claims of effectiveness supported by evidence) should be valued by the institution.
5. Create a culture for review and support.