

Structuring Self-Evaluations
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Self-evaluations play a critical role in faculty review by providing a context for the faculty member's work. To be of service to both reviewers and candidates for tenure or promotion, a self-evaluation must provide a critique of the faculty member's work that informs the evaluative process but also places the faculty member's case in the strongest possible light. To be credible, it must be supported by thoughtfully selected materials in the candidate's file.

The Value of Self-evaluations in Faculty Evaluation

Skeptics contend that a self-evaluation submitted for the purposes of tenure or promotion is intrinsically self-promotional and contributes little of value to the evaluative process, and it is true that the author of a self-evaluation desires to describe her or himself as favorably as possible. However, one cannot so easily dismiss a well-reasoned, evidence-based self-evaluation that includes the following components: a description of the author's goals and strategies for achieving those goals, a rationale for selecting those goals and strategies, an assessment of the author's progress in meeting his or her goals, and a reflective statement that draws on an informed self-critique to describe the faculty member's perception of his or her professional trajectory and addresses both the work that she or he has completed and the ground she or he hopes yet to cover. Such a self-evaluation is far more than a bald claim; it is an argument that intends to persuade the reader of the truth of its claims using sound evidence and good reasons. A careful examination of goals, strategies, rationale, assessment, future plans, and reflection is content that can be judged (Cranton, 2001), and as with any argument, the author must establish his or her credibility by accurately portraying both successes and failures.

In accepting the self-evaluation as an argument of the type that rests at the core of much academic work, we recognize that faculty evaluation is not an objective scientific endeavor that seeks to illuminate an absolute truth (Braskamp & Ory, 1994, pp. 14 and 111; Cranton, 2001). We also recognize that the faculty member is the individual best placed to provide much of the information that we need to evaluate the faculty member's work: learning goals for students, professional goals, perceived niche in the institution and program, teaching philosophy and strategies, areas of focus for teaching and scholarly development, methods of obtaining feedback about teaching and scholarly effectiveness, and a description of changes that were prompted by feedback (Braskamp & Ory, 1994, pp. 84-85; Fink 1988, 2001; Seldin, 1999). Rather than serving as an annotated curriculum vita that provides nothing more than a list of accomplishments, a good self-evaluation includes reflections on the faculty member's work that portray the faculty member's best thinking about his or her professional life (Braskamp & Ory, 1994, p. 111).

The other major concern with the self-evaluation as an evaluative instrument is the differences in presentation skills and attitude with which faculty approach writing one. Critics argue that a weak faculty member with a strong self-evaluation may appear to be stronger than an excellent faculty member who is self-effacing or who has not been given sufficient guidance in crafting a persuasive self-evaluation (Seldin, 1999). Lessons learned in assisting faculty with constructing effective teaching portfolios suggest that these problems can be avoided. Since the self-evaluation is to be rooted in evidence, it is difficult or impossible for a weak faculty member to present a convincing case. The use of agreed upon criteria and standards for using the document to evaluate faculty can further the reliability of the self-evaluation used in summative evaluation (Centra, 2000; Braskamp & Ory, 1994, p. 234). Finally, proponents of portfolios agree that effective mentorship is required if documents like self-evaluations are to develop the clarity and basis in evidence necessary for summative evaluation (Edgerton, Hutchings, & Quinlan 1991; Seldin, 1997; Zubizarreta, 1999). By providing faculty an opportunity to work with an experienced colleague when crafting a self-evaluation, and by providing clear direction, as we do in the section that follows, we can strengthen the utility of self-evaluations for both faculty evaluation and faculty development.

Structuring a Self-evaluation for Effective Evaluation and Professional Development

The self-evaluation addresses the core issues of teaching, professional development, and service, but faculty projects do not always fall neatly into these areas—researching material for courses can lead to both good teaching and new scholarly work, new scholarship can inform teaching, and any contribution to the life of the College can be construed as service. So rather than considering them as categories, we suggest that faculty consider teaching, scholarship, and service as lenses through which to view their work. The most useful self-evaluations will then reflect on a faculty member's activities from each perspective in turn.

To be useful, a self-evaluation must portray the faculty member's thinking about his or her work and provide a framework that assists the reader in discerning how well the faculty member is meeting the relevant criteria for excellence. Since reviewers are charged with determining the likelihood of future success, the self-evaluation should also outline future plans and demonstrate how they can be expected to lead to continued excellence. In doing so, the self-evaluation documents a scholarly approach to each aspect of the faculty member's work. In our model for the self-evaluation, we use Glassick, Huber, and Maeroff's definition of scholarship (1997, chap. 2) to frame an examination of each area of faculty responsibility.

Classroom Teaching

Good teaching is multi-faceted and is accomplished in as many different ways as there are good teachers. However, all good teaching shares four attributes that mark it as scholarly teaching as defined by Richlin (2001): clear goals, implementation that is informed by both personal experience and the practices of the broader disciplinary community, ongoing assessment that is designed to evaluate the effectiveness of the

teaching and suggest ways it could be improved, ongoing reflection that leads to continuous improvement. We codify these attributes as conception, implementation, evaluation, and reflection. Although different faculty will choose to address these topics in different ways, we provide a series of directives that can help faculty identify how they might address each:

- *Conception* Describe your teaching goals. Often this is best accomplished by describing the learning goals for students in your classes. Describe how you conceive of your students and their needs, and explain why the goals you have established make sense for this population and your discipline. If this is not your first self-evaluation, revisit the teaching goals identified in your last self-evaluation, and if relevant, describe how they have evolved and the factors that prompted the change. Rather than proceeding course by course, highlight themes across courses, and/or use a few representative courses as case studies.
- *Implementation* Describe your teaching methods and how they are intended to help your students attain the learning goals you have established. Note any student characteristics that influence your choice of methods. Situate your methods in the practice of the discipline and in your own teaching history. If you recently implemented a change in your teaching practice, describe the change, define the teaching or learning issue it addresses, and explain why you expected the change to improve your teaching effectiveness. If you proposed changes in your last self-evaluation, briefly describe the proposed changes and the rationale behind them. You can provide evidence and help clarify your points by including representative classroom materials in an appendix to the self-evaluation or in your file and explicitly referring to them in your narrative.
- *Evaluation* Evaluate the effectiveness of your teaching practice relative to your goals, and explain on what data you are basing your evaluation. Student response to your courses as measured by RSEs and other avenues of student input should be included. Your evaluation should include discussion of how you know whether students are meeting the learning goals you have established as well as your assessment of their success in attaining these goals. If this is not your first self-evaluation, comment on the impact of any changes you have implemented since your last self-evaluation was completed and indicate whether the changes precipitated the intended outcomes.
- *Reflection* Reflect on your teaching practice. Identify your primary teaching strengths and the challenges you face in your teaching. Then identify one or two specific issues related to your teaching on which you would like to focus during the next year or two. Describe the actions you intend to take with respect to investigating and addressing this issue, explain why you believe your approach will have the desired impact on student learning or your teaching experience. In preparation for assessment in your next self-evaluation, describe observable student behaviors, learning, or practice you expect any changes to induce.

Teaching in other Venues

Teaching occurs in multiple arenas. Faculty who have significant teaching responsibilities outside the classroom should describe those activities (e.g., extended

office hours or conferences with students, directing student research or creative projects, supervising student workers, advising incoming students or majors, working with student organizations) and address the same areas as for classroom teaching: conception, implementation, evaluation, and reflection.

Scholarship

Language that describes scholarship is often vague. For example, Allegheny College's Faculty Handbook (2000) defines professional development "as a systematic and extended effort to enhance one's understanding and competence in areas of responsibility and interest. ... The results or findings testify to the life of the [faculty member's] mind (par. II.2.13)." Although the Handbook clearly indicates that to be successful, faculty must demonstrate intellectual vitality, it is decidedly less clear in describing what constitutes such a demonstration. To assist that project, we provide a series of directives that might frame a self-evaluation that demonstrates an active life of the mind:

- *Evaluation and Reflection* Describe the tangible outcomes of professional development work completed since your last self-evaluation. Identify aspects of the work that are particularly noteworthy, explain and document the impact of the work, and comment on how the work informs your ongoing professional development. Address how the work responds to goals established in earlier self-evaluations, or describe how and why the focus of your work shifted to incorporate new goals in response to unanticipated challenges or opportunities. Explain how and why the work evolved, what strategies were effective and why, what you would do differently and why, and what you learned that might apply to future work.
- *Conception* Describe your current professional interests, and explain what you would like to accomplish in your professional development over the next five to ten years. Provide a context for the work you propose by describing and documenting the current state of the field. When appropriate indicate how the work proposed impacts your other areas of professional responsibility.
- *Implementation* Describe the skills or knowledge you bring to bear on the work that you propose, as well as what you will need to do to prepare yourself to move forward. Describe the methods that you intend to use to accomplish your goals, and demonstrate that they are appropriate for the project you propose. Given your objectives, describe what you intend to accomplish in the next year that will help you achieve your long-term objectives. Although, it is reasonable to propose exploratory work for the short term (e.g., library work, interviews, course work, attendance at workshops or professional meetings), long-term objectives should include tangible results: a publication, a work of art or performance, a functioning partnership with a community group, a report to a professional group, a web site, a CD-ROM, or other product of professional development.

In general, the target of the self-evaluation will not be expert in the candidate's area(s) of scholarship, so it is best to avoid jargon and to resist the temptation to get bogged down in detail that would be of little interest to the non-specialist.

Service

The vitality of a college depends on the continued effort of the faculty to foster a learning community. Faculty should indicate clearly the roles they have played in the maintenance of the College or University at the departmental and institutional levels. Such work also benefits from careful planning and reflection, and faculty are encouraged to identify the roles they are best equipped to play in the ongoing life of the institution. Typically, the same attention to preparation and skill development is required to reach goals in the area of service as is required in other areas of faculty life, and faculty may find it useful to employ a structure similar to that they used for professional development in defining and developing their role in community service.

Final Words

A clearly written, focused, accessible, and concise self-evaluation is likely to serve a candidate better than a long document in which the main points can become lost in less important details. In general, ten single-spaced pages are more than enough for the tenure review; shorter is better. Self-evaluations for reviews in the first year should typically be two to five pages, and self-evaluations for the pre-tenure review are typically three to seven pages.

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