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Navigating the Realm of Faculty Evaluation

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Navigating the Realm of Faculty Evaluation

Presentation Overview:

Faculty performance review is an important activity at all institutions of higher education. When done correctly, this process can help the retention and advancement of faculty. In this presentation, evaluators from three different disciplines (Chemistry, Physics, and Information Technology) will share the process of faculty annual evaluation in the School of Science and Technology at Georgia Gwinnett College. The presentation will provide an overview of the college and evaluative characteristics that differentiate it from other institutions. This will help set context for the remainder of the presentation. Both Chemistry and Information Technology are large disciplines with upwards of 40 full-time faculty. Physics discipline has more than 10 faculty. Thus, the presentation will provide different perspectives of evaluation in disciplines of various sizes. The presentation will discuss the following topics: 1) evaluation framework, 2) working successfully with a team of evaluators, 3) essential skills for evaluators, 4) strategies to ensure successful and consistent evaluations even in a large department, 5) challenges and solutions, and 6) successes experienced in the presenters' departments. Presenters will share snapshots of template documents, such as evaluation portfolio and rubrics. We will further invite participants to share their successes and challenges. A detailed presentation outline is attached.

Presentation Description:

Background:

Georgia Gwinnett College (GGC) is a baccalaureate degree granting, public institution created in 2006. The college is an open-access, liberal arts institution within the University System of Georgia. Its School of Science and Technology houses Biology, Chemistry, Environmental Science, Exercise Science, Information Technology, Mathematics and Physics disciplines. It has more than 200 full-time faculty. As a new institution created in the 21st century, it has some unique characteristics when compared to most institutions of higher education. For example, GGC does not have a traditional department structure. Instead, faculty are organized by disciplines. All large disciplines are led by a Chair of Faculty (CoF) – responsible for personnel matters, including evaluations and a Chair of Studies (CoS) – responsible for curriculum matters. For the smaller Physics discipline, both roles are combined into one. GGC faculty receive rank and promotion, but no tenure. Hence, the annual evaluation is comprehensive and plays an important role in faculty advancement and retention.

Faculty Evaluation Framework:

The evaluation process within an academic year at GGC involves six (6) major steps as noted per month. The following Figure 1 demonstrates the overview of the faculty evaluation process. The evaluator usually reviews the performance of 10-12 faculty members; larger disciplines (greater than 12) will have assistance from senior faculty as discipline evaluators with 10-12 faculty to review. Each evaluatee begins in August with drafting and submitting their goals for each year in the tenets of teaching, student engagement, service, and scholarship/creative activities. Then the evaluator meets with evaluatees in September to discuss their goals for the year and possibly observe their teaching (every 2 years). In October, the evaluator provides initial feedback to faculty and distributes this useful guidance to each evaluatee. Close to the end of the academic year in April, the evaluatee submits two important documents: 1) annual portfolio of accomplishments and experiences and 2) an updated goals document. The evaluator wraps up the year with the evaluatee

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with a final meeting to discuss the year in review and documents final notes. Finally, the evaluator completes an evaluation report, solicits review from the faculty member and submits the penultimate evaluations report to the Dean with supporting documents (Faculty Evaluation Support Form, teaching observation, annual portfolio).

August	September	October	April	May	June
•Evaluee drafts and submits goals for the year on Faculty Evaluation Support Form (FESF).	•Meet with evaluees and discuss FESF •Observe teaching (every 2 years)	•Evaluator documents initial notes on FESF •Distributes a copy to faculty	•Evaluee submits: •1) annual portfolio •2) updated goals on FESF	•Meet with evaluees and discuss year in review •Evaluator documents final notes on FESF	•Complete FT evaluation report •Solicit feedback/review from faculty on FT evaluation report. •Submit final evaluation report to Dean with supporting documents (FESF, teaching observation, annual portfolio)

Figure 1. Overview of the faculty evaluation process.

Working With a Team of Evaluators:

Discipline evaluators have higher rank than the evaluee. The CoF ensures that the evaluator team understands the main goals and philosophy behind annual evaluations. To maintain consistency in evaluation standards, the evaluators use a standard tool/rubric. In addition, the evaluators discuss common issues and questions with the entire team regularly, while maintaining confidentiality of evaluees. Open communication channels and clear communication are vital to ensure consistency in evaluating such a large group of faculty.

Skills Required:

There are essential skills needed for an evaluator. An evaluator must be unbiased as they listen to each faculty member. Critical thinking skills such as problem-solving and conflict management are extremely important for an evaluator. There may be scenarios presented to an evaluator in which one must “think on your feet” and provide fair, constructive solutions that encourage development of faculty. These constructive solutions are strategic guidance fashioned individually for each evaluee. During the process of evaluating faculty, one must close the loop and pursue accountability for faculty as documented in their goals for the year. Setting clear expectations and clear communication are also important skills for all evaluators.

Challenges and Solutions:

In presenters’ experience, common challenges result from lack of clear understanding or communication about faculty role expectations. These issues can be avoided by adopting the evaluation framework described above. The initial goal setting meeting and the final review meeting are crucial in ensuring clear communication between the evaluator and the evaluee.

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Evaluators can also share an example of how each category will be evaluated, so that faculty know what is expected of them to meet expectations, exceed expectations, etc.

Successes:

Some highlights of successes resulting from a fair and consistent evaluation process at GGC are as below:

- High success rate among SST faculty:
 - Promotions
 - Awards
 - Research productivity and grants
- Positive faculty feedback
- High retention rate among full-time SST faculty
- Confidence in Chairs among SST faculty

Overall, the evaluation framework provides a way to conduct comprehensive evaluation that contributes to faculty retention and advancement.