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ABSTRACT

This paper examines efforts by the Department of Psychology at Ursinus College (Pennsylvania) to realign its faculty evaluation, promotion, and tenure guidelines with the increasing emphasis placed on student-centered instruction at the college. It focuses on the need to link faculty rewards with student achievement and to give faculty more input on college evaluation, promotion, and tenure guidelines. The Department of Psychology used a multi-step process that focused on: (1) faculty self-evaluation and discussion; (2) departmental discussion about faculty roles, workload, and rewards; (3) a college-wide departmental chairs' meeting to discuss faculty roles and time allocation; (4) departmental discussion about the relationship between faculty rewards and student achievement; (5) departmental discussion about the current incentive system and suggestions for change; (6) faculty self-evaluation of teaching and research activities; and (7) the development and implementation of new faculty evaluation, promotion, and tenure guidelines. The effectiveness of these changes at Ursinus College is then reviewed. (MDM)

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Revamping Faculty Evaluation Methods:

Rewarding Student-Centered Teaching

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ABSTRACT

As we have come to emphasize student outcomes more in our thinking and our work, it has become obvious that linking faculty rewards more explicitly to student achievement can promote faculty priorities more consonant with an institution's educational mission. Since preparing undergraduates for productive lives is our main objective, it seems desirable to encourage faculty to allocate their time in ways that translate more directly to student achievement.

The best of what we do, we do because it helps to transform our students. We exist to equip students with the prerequisite skills for the adulthood they desire (the one we wish for them: one that is thoughtful, conscientious, and conscious!). Perhaps the principal test of the worthiness of any contemplated faculty activity is its connection to student change. Our experience indicates that linking faculty evaluation criteria and student outcomes can promote increased productivity and collaboration among faculty and students.

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Background

In recent years, like many comparable institutions, Ursinus College has become increasingly student-centered. As a consequence, faculty allocate their time and energy in ways not always accurately reflected by current faculty evaluation and promotion and tenure guidelines. While salary increments based on merit have existed at Ursinus and many other colleges for some time, few explicit discussions about the bases for these types of awards typically take place. As small liberal art colleges increase their scholarly expectations of faculty, and deploy new standards for faculty evaluation reflecting these higher professional benchmarks, faculty members increasingly raise questions about what are deemed appropriate tradeoffs.

Faculty members are undeniably working harder than in the previous decade, despite the widespread adoption of new curricula which increase standard course credits from 3 to 4, which on many campuses effectively reduced many faculty members' teaching loads. The need to accommodate the rising tide of student expectations has precluded complacency. The surplus time and energy liberated by such new curricula has generally been absorbed by a variety of activities, including inventive and labor-intensive course improvements to facilitate active learning, growing incorporation of technology in courses and research, increased faculty scholarship (both with and without student involvement), more comprehensive student advising, spiraling involvement in admissions-related recruitment activities, increased development of student service and internship projects, and creation of better mechanisms for showcasing student achievement.

Midst this explosion of innovative activity, faculty have voiced concerns about impending burnout, inequities across departments, and anxieties about reward contingencies. Many seem to be seeking guidance about how to structure their priorities, and/or greater reassurance that they are making choices that their administration sees as consonant with institutional objectives. Most faculty members feel they are "on the right track" , but would welcome more focused

conversation about faculty roles and rewards.

#### Reward Systems that Reflect New Campus Realities

Aligning the "new teaching" that has developed on many campuses and their formal policies describing faculty roles and rewards is an important challenge. To the extent that faculty choices about how to invest their energies are predicated on extrinsic rewards, as expectations shift it is vital to revisit and revise reward policies. To the extent that intrinsic factors spur faculty innovation, informed conversation about the common objectives that should be guiding individual choices can reduce disappointment that otherwise can arise when well-intentioned independent efforts are unappreciated because they fail to contribute to realization of the larger community vision. Our institutional missions generally place student development at the center. Accordingly, in revising teaching and scholarship expectations, we must explore more explicit ways of placing a premium on faculty activities that benefit students.

#### Linking Faculty Evaluation & Student Outcomes

As we have come to emphasize student outcomes more in our thinking and our work, it has become obvious that linking faculty rewards more explicitly to student achievement can promote faculty priorities more consonant with an institution's educational mission. Since

preparing undergraduates for productive lives is our main objective, it seems desirable to encourage faculty to allocate their time in ways that translate more directly to student achievement.

The best of what we do, we do because it helps to transform our students. We exist to equip students with the prerequisite skills for the adulthood they desire (the one we wish for them: one that is thoughtful, conscientious, and conscious!). Perhaps the principal test of the worthiness of any contemplated faculty activity is its connection to student change.

For example, an argument might be made that if the primary value of research in a liberal arts context is its salutary impact on teaching, scholarship choices that intentionally and efficiently help to transform students (either through direct student involvement in projects, or through discernable improvement of classroom pedagogy) should be most highly valued and encouraged through incentives. It might also be argued that it is consistent with the missions of most liberal arts colleges to reward faculty members for devoting time to research, internship, and service projects that challenge students to discover their best, and to create means of showcasing the resulting student accomplishment.

Some might argue that placing student needs first can compromise traditional faculty development,

potentially at the peril of the nontenured. For this reason, the nature of the commitment a college reasonably owes a student-centered teacher whose own independent scholarship gets postponed should be examined thoughtfully. Strategies for discovering ways to mesh student and faculty development needs should be engineered and shared to promote mutual benefits, and protect those yet to be granted tenure.

#### Responding to New Demands to "Work Smarter"

Techniques to avoid succumbing to the tyranny of voice- and e-mail, and instead to exploit their ability to help us "teach smarter", must be found and circulated widely. The faculty should be enjoined to weigh the relative merits of rewarding outcomes versus effort (e.g., if faculty members create a labor-intensive labyrinth and it yields no measurable student outcome advantage, is it reasonable to reward them more than those who develop streamlined mechanisms for achieving comparable results?). The feasibility of enhancing quantity without sacrificing quality must be explored; where quantity matters and where quality matters must be decided. We must determine where in our duties it's acceptable to "satisfice".

We must examine whether certain classes can be taught "large" (some faculty already make calculated choices of this nature in order to "buy time" to devote

to students' individualized learning experiences); the methods and rationale for doing so must be discussed. The demand to "work smarter" can challenge and energize a faculty within a context of sufficient collegial support. Learning is what most professors love best.

Deliberations about such issues tend to surface various faculty concerns and promote debate. A participative process can help build support for policy recommendations. The centrality of student outcomes can provide faculty with a common point of reference that permits the crafting of meaningful compromises.

#### A Common Sense of Purpose

To progress most expediently, faculty must embrace a common understanding of their purpose, explore alternative ways of reaching those goals, and habitually assess the efficiency and efficacy of particular faculty activities through outcomes assessment using student impact as the prime criterion. Through collaborative effort, involving increased communication about the results of departmental experiments with methods for increasing productivity by redefining faculty roles, faculties often come to identify a hierarchy of faculty activities that could be differentially rewarded, depending on the activity's efficiency in achieving the common primary objective of student transformation.

Alternatively, faculty can opt for a more ambiguous



system of evaluation. While it may be mutually agreed that demonstrating a favorable impact on students is the ultimate test for any faculty activity, given our pluralistic environment, a given institution may decide that at certain times some faculty should be held less accountable to the student outcomes standard than others (e.g., nontenured faculty might be given more time for independent scholarship; those with heavy committee service might be treated differently, etc.). Clearer articulation of the relationship that should exist between faculty evaluation and institutional relevance can result in changes in incentive systems that more efficiently reward individuals and departments for continuing to learn how to deliver education more and more effectively. Greater devotion of faculty energy to outside-of-classroom teaching of various types can be a desirable consequence of redefining faculty achievement in terms of student impact.

#### The Ursinus Psychology Department Program

Maximizing the effective intellectual interaction between faculty and students requires consensus about educational purpose and how it can be measured, creative consideration of innovative methods to maximize both student and faculty productivity, collaborative sharing of lessons learned during experimentation, clear contingencies that support efforts that reflect current

institutional priorities, and lastly, communication about changes in institutional circumstances that might require flexible revision of activity in years to come (i.e. if priorities should shift). Our department has used a highly participatory process to engage as many faculty members as possible in this exploration.

This initiative was developed to help us learn in a way that minimized fractious tendencies and facilitated discovery of common ground. Ambiguity about reward contingencies and lack of communication had previously contributed to some divisive misperceptions and counterproductive competition. This project helped to promote better awareness of the hard innovative work that was being done throughout the department. Since the faculty had already been prodding itself, and had set increasingly high standards, the program attempted to project a tone of celebration.

The department's faculty was already largely sensitized to the demands of the marketplace and was committed to enhancing educational excellence. Accordingly, we were at a critical juncture: we had changed how we teach, and needed to make departmental policies reflect this. This initiative had significant impact by harnessing existing motivation on the campus to reflect on how we can become even better. Our department was poised for a systematic examination of

how the "new teaching" (cooperative & collaborative learning, and outside-of-classroom programs) should be institutionalized.

This project helped to build greater consensus regarding institutional priorities, and explored ways of linking student outcomes, the "new teaching", and faculty rewards. It helped to quantify recent changes in teaching, and thereby articulated the transformation that was already well underway. It stimulated continued growth in innovative teaching, and facilitated measurable increases in outside-of-classroom teaching activities. It fostered consensus about what changes in faculty evaluation policies and procedures would be desirable. Finally, it resulted in the development of policy revisions reflecting departmental conclusions, that helped guide advances in productivity.

Project Description: Process & Timing

COMMUNITY REFLECTION: NEEDS ASSESSMENT

1. Faculty self evaluations & discussion of attitudes about incentives:

What are the dominant faculty concerns and desires?

How has your role changed?

To which incentives are you most responsive?

Are new incentives or new contingencies warranted?

Pre-program assessment of outside-of-classroom teaching activities, research productivity, and innovative classroom activities (baseline data)

Review of Current General Faculty Reward Policies and Mechanisms (handbook, etc.)

2. Preliminary introduction of project to Department

Departmental discussion about faculty roles, workload, and rewards:

- How have faculty roles changed?
- How do we gauge our transformation?
- Are we sufficiently supported in our efforts to enhance educational quality efficiently?
- What changes in the incentive system might permit us to increase our success in achieving student success?

3. Use of Departmental Chairs' Meeting as General Resource

- What motivates faculty to allocate their time most effectively?
- Can department chairs facilitate more optimal allocation of time?
- Review of departmental data on changes in faculty roles

4. CONVENING THE CONVERSATION: Aligning incentives with the "new teaching"

1. How is the "new teaching" best measured?
2. How should faculty be accountable for student outcomes?
3. How can we better recognize, reward and publicize the "new teaching"?
4. How can intrinsic motivation best be preserved?
5. Can faculty evaluations, student outcomes assessment, and institutional publicity occur more seamlessly?
6. What is our common objective?
7. How do we measure our collective and individual success?
8. How do we learn from one another about how to work smarter?
9. How should we reward ourselves for learning to be more effective?
10. How might the college reward us for being more effective?
11. How can we use our success to promote the college to promising candidates?

5. This next meeting focused on problems with the current incentive system and on suggestions for improving it.

1. How can chairs assess outside-of-classroom teaching more accurately & efficiently?

2. Can this include measures of student achievement?

3. Can the self evaluation process be made more efficient & more encouraging of teaching productivity?

4. What policy changes are necessary?

6. Faculty self evaluations and assessment of outside-of-classroom teaching activities, research productivity, and innovative classroom activities (midpoint data)  
(Comparison with baseline data permitted assessment of midprogram impact)

#### 7. ARTICULATING OUR SOLUTIONS: Implementing Changes

Internal: New departmental evaluation criteria were developed and submitted to the administration for review and comment. A subsequent draft reflected administrative feedback designed to keep departmental criteria roughly consistent campus-wide. Copies of the new criteria are distributed before each annual faculty review; faculty conduct their self evaluation in terms of the new student-centered criteria.

External: Our department initiated involvement with the campus Outcomes Assessment Committee, and presented a proposal reflecting some of our conclusions about the advantages of making student transformation a departmental priority, and tying faculty evaluation to student measurable achievement. These recommendations are currently under review.

8. Post-program assessment of outside-of-classroom teaching activities, research productivity, and innovative classroom activities (endpoint data was obtained to permit evaluation of program impact...ongoing collection of follow-up data will permit assessment of long term effects of policy changes).

#### Outcomes

This conversation helped move our inchoate advances further along, and hopefully will make the recent shifts a lasting redirection. This project gave better form to changes in the departmental culture that

were already well underway and celebrated the faculty's proven willingness to expand their responsibilities, increase their accountability, and reformulate their definitions of success. In addition, it allowed fine-tuning of recent innovations in policies in light of our experience with them, and helped to build greater consensus about criteria to be employed in evaluating the desirability of changes contemplated in the future.

By developing such common criteria, and a clearer sense of the overarching priorities of the campus, all members of the department are "on the same page"; this more deeply shared understanding of Ursinus's purpose has expedited decision-making about appropriate initiatives both individuals and departments consider undertaking. As a result of this conversation, individuals and departments seem to be employing a more consistent and coherent process in planning how to allocate their resources for optimal productivity.

Student research involvement has grown to 100%; over 90% of departmental majors present their research findings at conferences; and nearly 40% of our majors have published coauthored papers in the past few years. The rate of faculty publication and research presentation has also increased significantly. Increased out-of-classroom teaching activity has not been limited to research. Participation in internships and volunteer programs has grown dramatically, and the

number of sites faculty have developed as options for students to use has increased significantly. Out-of-classroom improvements have not been at the expense of classroom initiatives; development of new labs and learning exercises, increased use of electronic techniques for enhancing teaching effectiveness in the class (e.g., large communal data sets, the Web, student videotape projects, etc.), and use of invited expert speakers have all increased as well.

Within our department, we have found it very helpful to link increasing scholarly expectations of faculty to our growing emphasis on student outcomes. Pressuring tenured faculty to be more productive in their research can often produce massive resistance and ill-will. It can foster petty rivalries and create destructive competition within the campus. One way of diffusing these problems, that seems to have benefitted the Ursinus campus, involves couching higher productivity expectations in terms of consensually desired improvements in student achievement. Priority is given to research activities that are integrated with the faculty member's teaching role. Collaborative involvement of students in research projects is recognized as a premier form of professional activity. Presenting and publishing papers coauthored with students is explicitly valued.

The focus is on helping students acquire

professional skills in their discipline, and develop a record of accomplishment that demonstrates their competence. Use of student portfolios and resume-development workshops maintain faculty emphasis on the goal of enhancing students' career options. By divesting faculty of sole ownership of a research project, and defining a main purpose of faculty scholarship as educational, all faculty projects seem to be experienced as more communal property of the entire department. Greater altruistic response seems to flow from the perception that the entire group of faculty members benefits from the success of each individual's projects, because such success is linked clearly to the mutual goal of enhancing the reputation of the department's ability to profit students and "add value". All faculty flexibly accommodate one another's projects, refer appropriate students, share resources and technical expertise, and conduct common workshops (e.g., to familiarize students with the use of statistical software). When a faculty member is unavailable to help a student, someone else eagerly pitches in, fostering an atmosphere students perceive as caring and committed.

Since the department's current objective is 100% student involvement in research, each faculty member is appreciated for their willingness to supervise as many student researchers as their team projects can



accomodate. Therefore, rather than being jealous of a professor whose specialization area attracts a disproportionate number of students, faculty members are appreciative for their proportionally reduced burden. Rather than selfishly protect their disproportionately large number of interested research students, the professors in more popular subdisciplines have an incentive (reduced workload) to work with fellow faculty to help them develop more compellingly attractive research options.

Framing liberal arts college faculty scholarship as something we primarily do for our students, seems to defuse destructive ego-involvement, and build a sense of common purpose. It allows faculty to work together more optimally, and provides a more ideal role model experience for students. (Contrast the above description of collaboration with what occurs in many departments with competitive climates, where students repeatedly observe the fine arts of peer back-stabbing and sabotaging). One indicator of the impact of this desirable observational learning is the success our students have had in creating high quality team projects. They generously give their time and energy, and comfortably share credit and a sense of victory. There have been surprisingly few complaints of inequities, despite the wide range of ability levels among students within the department and how this

inevitably contributes to disparities in contributions across students.

Promoting widespread public endorsement of a common "bottom line," through planned discussions about how to link institutional priorities and revised faculty evaluation criteria, appears to have increased individual productivity, student productivity, and support for the efforts of others. Team spirit is often enhanced when participants have the opportunity to articulate how their individual successes foster the common good. Our ongoing dialogue also permitted faculty to develop better ways of learning from one another's experiences with various solutions to the shared problem of increasing student outcomes while holding resources constant.

## Campus Discussion Questions

The following questions may be useful for encouraging more informed discussion about the linkages that need to be developed between the means we use to evaluate faculty success and those we use to measure student success. Faculty need to see themselves as more accountable for student achievement, in order to be encouraged to favor work that enhances educational objectives. Some feel faculty should have their students resumes and professional school applications in mind when they design educational experiences and select among various professional pursuits. Some believe that the demands of their disciplines should come second to those of their students at a small liberal arts college. Campus-wide conversations that explore these issues can facilitate institutional consensus.

1. What are our institutional priorities?
2. How do we mesh student and faculty development needs?
3. Which educational activities maximize the outcomes both students and faculty members desire?
4. How should faculty make decisions about how to allocate their professional time?
5. What institutional priorities guide faculty decision-making on our campus?

6. What activities do faculty choose to pursue?
7. Have these changed significantly since 1990?
8. Who has benefitted from these changes?
9. What tradeoffs have occurred and with what consequences?
10. What activities do faculty believe are extrinsically rewarded at our institution?
11. What incentives shape faculty allocation of time?
12. What motivates faculty to work as hard as they do?
13. Do existing incentives encourage faculty to perform optimally in terms of institutional priorities?
14. Which skills do students believe to demonstrably pay off in the job market?
15. Which skills do we want to teach students to value and desire?