# Performance evaluation in education

Author: Robert R. Newton



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# Performance Evaluation in Education

By Robert R. Newton

*CUPA is preparing a Guide to Performance Evaluation to be published later this year. See the CUPA Publications Brochure for more information.*

## THE FAILURE OF PERFORMANCE EVALUATION IN EDUCATION

Higher education has been more resistant to performance-based personnel evaluation than any other area. Despite efforts to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the educational enterprise by defining faculty responsibilities more precisely, the vast majority of faculty still receive rewards based on the general and often vaguely defined norms of research, teaching, and service. Merit-based compensation frequently has weak impact because of the reluctance of academic administrators to devise evaluative processes linking performance and compensation.

At the same time, education faces increasing pressure to move toward performance-based evaluation. Dissatisfaction with educational institutions has led both the institutions and those who support them to press for clearer definition of faculty and student accomplishments. Court decisions have shown educators the need for an objective system that will stand up when challenged in court. The oversupply of faculty in various fields, the fear of over-tenuring and the anticipated decline in enrollments have prompted the search for more reliable methods for distinguishing between those who will remain and those who will leave faculty ranks. The public, as well as teachers and administrators, distrust a system of evaluation that cannot distinguish the merely adequate from the excellent and that provides minimal basis for rewarding outstanding performance.

The major obstacle to a more outcome-oriented system of faculty evaluation has been the traditional vagueness of educational goals.[1] The conviction that the most important educational outcomes cannot be defined in terms of observable, measurable behaviors has led a majority of educators to resist using performance objectives or competency-based instruction.[2] Many faculty believe that it is difficult, if not impossible, to define in concrete terms what distinguishes excellent teaching from mediocre teaching. They argue that education is too much a process of interaction between teacher and student to be forced into a set of precisely delineated performance standards. Immediately visible results may not be as important as long-term educational effects—and who knows how these are promoted or produced?

Despite the lack of precise standards for teaching behavior and the resistance of teachers to performance rating systems, it seems inevitable that the teaching profession will be forced to move toward more objective performance standards. Legislatures, the courts, the public, and the education profession itself are converging to demand a more adequate system. More and more college administrators realize that in the recent past the burden of proof has shifted. Now, once hired, an individual has virtually established a right to position, unless it can be demonstrated that he or she did not meet fair, specific, and clear communicated criteria. It is to the advantage of both faculty and administrators to develop a system that objectively measures accomplishment and competence.

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Dr. Robert R. Newton is Associate Dean of Faculties at Boston College.

[1]Organizational development specialists such as Derr have reiterated the problems of the ambiguity and vagueness of educational goals. C. Brooklyn Derr, "'OD' Won't Work in Schools," *Education and Urban Society* 8 (February, 1976): 232.

[2]Elliott W. Eisner, "Instructional and Expressive Educational Objectives: Their Formulation and Use in Curriculum", in *Instructional Objectives*, W. J. Popham *et al* (Chicago: Rand-McNally, 1969), pp. 1-18.

## GUIDELINES FOR A POTENTIAL SOLUTION

Faculty may well be correct in arguing that behaviorally designed performance objectives do not fit the realities of teaching. An approach suitable for a sales organization or a production unit where targets are more easily defined and measured is not likely to be suitable for the teaching profession, where outcomes can neither be so clearly defined nor so precisely measured.[3] The concept of performance standards must be adapted to the special circumstances and demands of education. This human service profession, with less scientific technology, less well defined goals, and less precise measures of success, needs a performance middle ground.

The prospective solution must be:

- *objective*—eliminating or reducing dramatically discretionary evaluative judgments in favor of more objective criteria;
- *appropriate*—suited to the realities of the performance being measured and generally acceptable to those being evaluated;
- *measurable*—generating specific criteria by which levels of performance can be analyzed, calculated and recognized;
- *integrated*—demonstrating visible links between levels of performance and the compensation/recognition system;
- *flexible*—providing, within the guidelines of basic responsibilities, a context for the recognition of special interests, aptitudes, and initiative;
- *motivating*—producing a clear set of attainable, worthwhile objectives that become performance targets; and
- *discriminating*—distinguishing among levels of performance.

The model can fulfill these criteria. It is derived from a detailed analysis of potential contributions to the teaching mission of a college. Similar standards could be created for the research/publication and service dimensions of faculty responsibility.

## A MODEL PERFORMANCE-BASED TEACHER EVALUATION SYSTEM

The following standards for faculty performance provide a comprehensive description of the professional teaching responsibilities of faculty. Similar standards could be created for service and research/publication. The process of evaluation implied in the model has two phases; faculty self-evaluation and administrative review of self-evaluations. Four grades of faculty performance are defined: Excellent, Superior, Average and Below Average. In their self-evaluations, faculty propose that their performance during the past year falls into one of these categories.

**TABLE I**
**Standards for Faculty Performance**

| | Classroom Teaching | Additional Contributions |
|---|---|---|
| Excellent Performance | 25 points | 15 |
| Superior Performance | 20 | 10 |
| Average Performance | 16 | 7 |
| Below Average Performance | below 16 | below 7 |

### Classroom Teaching

Teaching is the most basic faculty responsibility. Faculty spend a large portion of their time and energy preparing for classroom instruction, teaching, and then following up on classroom instruction. Teaching effectiveness can take many forms. Table II indicates specific areas of faculty performance and their relative importance by number of points assigned.

[3]Paul R. Lawrence and Jay W. Lorsh, *Organization and Environment: Managing Differentiation and Integration* (Boston: Harvard University, 1967).

**TABLE II**
**Faculty Performance Areas**

| | |
|---|---|
| Regular teaching load (e.g., 3 courses per semester) with satisfactory *student* evaluations | 10 points |
| multipliers (student and/or peer or supervisory evaluations) | |
| very high evaluations | (1.50) |
| high evaluations | (1.25) |
| low evaluations | ( .75) |
| very low evaluations | ( .50) |
| additional considerations | |
| —extra course preparations | 2 |
| —new course (not taught in the past three years) | 2 |
| —large number of students (above normal load) | 2 |
| —additional (outside schedule) class meetings with groups of students | 2 |
| Development of significant instructional materials for personal classroom use | 1-3 |
| Frequent use of outside resources for the enrichment of classroom instruction (speakers, professional community involvement, etc.) | 1-3 |
| Significant additional instructional time spent with students outside normal classroom instruction | 1-5 |
| Development of new pedagogical methods | 1-3 |
| Significant revision of an existing course | 1-3 |

**TABLE III**
**Faculty Contributions to the Academic Environment**

| | |
|---|---|
| Academic advising (normal load) | 5 |
| additional considerations | |
| large number of advisees | 1-3 |
| significant additional activities for advisees | 1-2 |
| Membership on college-wide (committees for teaching/curricular improvement) | 1-2 |
| Membership on departmental committees (teaching/curricular) | 1-2 |
| Production of learning materials for use in classes other than one's own | 1-3 |
| Assistance in the professional development of other faculty (outside of departmental chair responsibilities) | 1-2 |
| Publication in journals on teaching methods | 1-3 |
| Publication of instructional materials used in other educational institutions | 1-4 |

### Additional Contributions to Teaching

The total environment in which instruction takes place, as well as the classroom teaching itself, affects the students. The active involvement of faculty with students produces an atmosphere that makes each college unique. Table III assigns point values to some of the professional ways in which faculty contribute to the academic environment of the college.

## IMPLICATIONS AND ADVANTAGES OF A PERFORMANCE-BASED TEACHER EVALUATION SYSTEM

The above system should be interpreted as a *model*. Although the categories and examples used are generally applicable to teaching performance, each faculty would work out an evaluation system geared to the particular purposes of the department or college. The performances expected of faculty in four-year colleges would differ obviously from that expected of faculty in research universities. The faculty of a particular college should build a performance evaluation system responsive to the needs of its students, much in the same way that other organizations assess the needs of their clients and create performance objectives for their staff matched to client needs.

The above system addresses criteria for performance-based evaluation. It is more *objective* than current systems because it shifts the proportional emphasis between typically vague discretionary judgments and objective data to favor visible accomplishments. Although every system needs evaluative judgments, the specific nature of performance described in this system are more independent of administrative judgments than other systems. Rather than arguing over conflicting opinions or impressions, both evaluators and the evaluatee focus on tangible achievements.

The increased objectivity of the system implies reduced conflict. The number of challenges to evaluative decisions should be significantly fewer because both parties work with a more clearly defined set of standards. With the clearer definition of what is expected, faculty can evaluate their own performances more accurately. The majority of categories in the evaluative model above are visible achievements, which are either present or not present. Similarly, the relative importance of these performances has been predetermined and is made clear to faculty. The same advantage extends to evaluators in fulfilling their responsibility for evaluation—the specificity of the system reduces the difficulty and vagueness normally encountered in evaluating individual faculty members.

This performance-based system is also *more appropriate for education* than behaviorally precise systems. With the broad goals of education and the extension of the definition of learning beyond immediate behavioral changes, the definition of faculty achievement is only partially amenable to behavioral objectives. The model is written in terms appropriate to professional teaching behavior. It avoids the pitfall of forcing faculty evaluation into a mold that works in other professional areas but not in education; at the same time, it attempts to draw evaluation of teaching out of the vagueness and lack of definition that have prevented any serious performance evaluation. The system proposes a performance middle ground adapted to the needs and realities of educational organizations.

The performance-based model provides a basis for *measuring levels of performance*. It creates a comprehensive and specific system, written in concrete terms requiring tangible evidence to support claims of the various levels of achievement. The system could lend itself to quantification; it also illustrates the relative importance attached to various categories.

Performance ratings can be integrated with the compensation/recognition system in a manner possible only with systems that focus on performance. The model directly states criteria for recognizing superior teaching in terms of activities and accomplishments. In a way not possible in systems that rely heavily on peer or administrative impressions, faculty can see a more certain link between their behavior and the rating or increased compensation desired. Obviously, this system also increases the certainty and expectancy of reward, which are essential to increasing levels of motivation.[4]

The system is also *flexible*. First, it insists on completing basic professional responsibilities, for example, through setting standards for student evaluation at a minimal level. At the same time, it allows considerable flexibility in the ways in which faculty may then choose to increase their level of performance. The system can easily be translated into a process of setting periodic performance targets for individual faculty members.

The system provides for a higher level of *motivation*. The adage that no amount of generalized exhortation can match the motivation effects of clearly defined standards applies here.[5] By defining levels of performance in a way that seems both clear and attainable to faculty, the performance-based approach suggests directions for teaching behavior and stimulates activity in the areas considered important by the college.

Finally, the system provides for *discriminating* among various levels of performance. In doing so, it attacks what many feel is one of the chief problems with the teaching profession—the absence of

[4]See, for example, David E. Terpestra "Theories of Motivation: Borrowing the Best", *Personnel Journal* 58 (June, 1979): 379.

[5]"In the absence of such (performance) standards, no amount of generalized motivation can produce satisfactory results. Where standards have been made clear, they have strong motivating effects in themselves." George S. Odiorne, *MBO II: A System of Managerial Leadership for the 80's* (Belmont, CA: Fearon Pitman Publishers, 1979), p. 63.

incentives that encourage and reward excellence and initiative. In addition, the system suggests a new approach to merit pay plans by supplying a basis for calculating differences in performance.

In the past, merit pay plans have failed because of the inability of educators to define and apply clear criteria for discriminating among levels of performance.

## SUMMARY CONCLUSION

No profession has been more resistant to performance standards than education. Contemporary pressures are forcing educators to re-examine ways in which to make evaluation of faculty more performance-based. The model system presented suggests a performance middle ground more appropriate to the realities of the teaching profession. At the same time, it promotes the values associated with performance-based evaluation: measurability, objectivity, integration of performance with recognition and compensation, flexibility in application, discrimination among levels of performance, and greater emphasis on achievement and motivation.

Performance-based evaluation in education has been noted more for its misapplication than for its success in generating more effective and productive educational institutions. Currently, it deserves serious re-examination. If performance-based evaluation is to achieve a place in education, it must develop a form suited to the distinctive needs of the teaching profession. Only with such adaptation will performance-based evaluation succeed and demonstrate to educators and to the public the power of performance rating systems to monitor and improve teaching.