

PART IX

Review of faculty merit evaluation procedures

Discussion of the EFC/APT Merit Review Report (see the following MEMORANDUM) during the EFC May 7 meeting had resulted in the following motion:

“Whereas the accurate evaluation of the faculty performance is of a fundamental importance to the University, be it resolved that all recommendations of the EFC/APT Merit Review Subcommittee for the annual faculty merit evaluation procedures be approved and implemented starting Fall 2014 in VSOE.”

The motion was seconded and discussed. It passed unanimously.

MEMORANDUM

TO: Yannis Yortsos, Dean, Viterbi School of Engineering

CC: Timothy Pinkston, Vice Dean for Faculty Affairs
Joe Kunc, Chair, Engineering Faculty Council;
Antonio Ortega, Chair, Appointments Promotions and Tenure Committee

FROM: EFC-APT Merit Evaluation Committee
Antonio Ortega, Koping Kirk Shung , Mansour Rahimi, Firdaus E. Udwadia (Chair)

DATE: April 18, 2014

RE: Report on Merit Review Process, Spring 2014

1. Background

EFC/APT Merit Review Subcommittee is a joint sub-committee of the APT committee and the EFC. The purpose of the Subcommittee is to review the annual faculty merit evaluation procedures used in each of the nine departments in Viterbi. The Handbook specifies that the Subcommittee consist of members from at least three different departments, drawn jointly from the APT committee and the EFC. The charge of the Subcommittee is to review the procedures followed in the annual faculty merit recommendations suggested to the Dean by the departments, to assess whether due process, as stipulated in the various departmental, school and university procedures and guidelines, was followed, and to make recommendations on ways to improve it.

2. Spring 2014 Departmental Merit Review Procedures

Prior to commencing the Department Merit Review, the Vice Dean (Professor Timothy Pinkston) distributes to Department Chairs a memo providing the *VSoE Policy on Annual Faculty Evaluations*.

3. Spring 2014 EFC/APT Procedures

Members of the EFC/APT Subcommittee met with each Department Chair to review the departmental merit review procedure and data. These meetings took place on 2/26, 2/28, 3/4, 3/7, 3/12, and 3/14, 2014. The following chairs were interviewed: Geoff Spedding (AME), Dan Erwin (ASTE), Norberto Grzywacz (BME), Lucio Soibelman (CE/ENE), Gourav Sukhatme (CSCI), Eun Sok Kim (EE-P), Sandeep Gupta (EE-S), Julie Higle (ISE), and Steve Nutt (MFD). Not all members of the committee were present at all meetings, and in compliance with the APT

Handbook, members of the Subcommittee who belonged to the same department as the department chair interviewed were excused.

4. Observations

- Each Chair was found to have made a good faith and commendable effort to ensure that her/his department was in reasonable compliance with *VSoE Policy on Annual Faculty Evaluation*.
- There was considerable diversity among the departments in the manner in which the Merit Evaluation was carried out. Some relied more heavily on quantitative data, other on qualitative data, and several had a mix of both qualitative and quantitative data. This was found to be acceptable, and expected, given the diversity of the departments, the large disparity among the number of faculty in each department, and the diversity of research between departments and even within some departments.
- The election/selection of members of the Merit Evaluation Committee varied considerably between departments; some departmental Merit Evaluation Committees were elected, others were suggested by the Chair and approved by the faculty, and some were partially elected and partially selected.
- Departments used a variety of methods to collect data for merit review evaluations. Some used special forms, some used incremental CVs, others full CVs, and some used CVs with contributions in the current year highlighted.
- Some of the Chairs were unaware that faculty members in their department who were also working in the Dean's Office had only part-time appointments in the Dean's Office. These faculty members were not evaluated in any department for their contributions as per their load profiles for the portion of their time spent in their departmental duties.
- Except for one Department Chair, the Chairs did not meet with all their individual faculty members to communicate the Merit Review Committee's and Chair's evaluations. The information provided to the faculty members at the end of the process varies from department to department. In some cases, faculty are given their merit review scores broken down by category along with their annual raise, while at the other extreme no information is provided by the department.

5. Recommendations

The Subcommittee recommends the following:

- The verbage in the first line of item 2 of the *VSOE Policy on Annual Faculty Evaluation* should exclude the clause “including Department Chairs,” since no department Chairs submit their AFR’s. This would be in keeping with the ground truth. Also, since the Chairs are evaluated by the Dean, this is clearly not necessary. Like all other faculty members in VSOE, Chairs would be, of course, required to fill out their yearly AFRs.
- Department Chairs should be encouraged to provide more uniform information to the ATP/ EFC Merit Review Committee. This would help the chairs focus on collecting and presenting the relevant data, and would also help the committee to provide a more uniform assessment across departments. For example, if department chairs have access to more quantitative raw data that is used by their departmental merit review committees, then it would be useful to share that with the APT/EFC merit review committee. We realize that some departmental committees do not tabulate such data.
- Department Chairs must be informed of the percentage of time their faculty members spend in the Dean’s office. Faculty members who have only part-time appointments in the Dean’s office need to have their load profiles properly adjusted to reflect the percentage of time they spend in the department. The contributions of such faculty members towards their departmental loads in research, teaching, and service must be assessed by their departmental Merit Review Committee in the same manner as any regular part-time faculty member, or any faculty member who may be on sabbatical leave of absence.
- Department Chairs should be encouraged to provide each faculty member in their department her/his research, teaching, and service evaluation scores, along with some information that can help them determine where they stand with respect to their peers. For example, the median scores in each of these areas or some kind of ranking information (top tier, 2nd tier, etc) could be provided. We think that in this way the Merit Evaluation process can provide useful feedback to the individual faculty members to improve their performance
- Department Chairs (except for one this year) do not meet with all their individual faculty members to inform them of the evaluations made by the Departmental Merit Review Committee and by the Chair, as stated in the *VSOE Policy on Annual Faculty Evaluation*. While the committee understands the reluctance of the Chairs in doing this, it appears that if this were not done, one of the main reasons for having a merit review—namely, to provide actionable feedback to individual faculty members to alter behavior towards self-improvement and higher performance—would be lost.

- One area where there were significant differences across departments was on the matter on whether to scale or not the merit review scores. We feel that the automated scaling to an average of 3 at the end of the process would be unfair. For example, in a department that does not have a wide distribution of scores, such a scaling forces an artificial spread in the final merit review scores. In teaching, where scores tend to be high (averages mostly around 4), it is reasonable to expect most faculty to score above 3. On the other hand, in research there can be significant differences in productivity. Such an artificial scaling of merit review scores should be abandoned. A suggested best practice may be for the departments to define what the various scores mean in terms of accomplishments and productivity and allow the department committees to follow this guideline for the scoring.