

*The regional accreditation process can be a valuable resource in bringing about changes in systems of faculty evaluation and rewards. Recent changes in the standards promulgated by the several regional accreditation associations have emphasized the importance of professional service as well as teaching. It is up to each college or university how much emphasis to give to these faculty activities within the context of its goals and objectives, but the accreditation standards mandate the existence of institutional policies and procedures regarding faculty work that are consistent with the institution's stated mission. The article describes what requirements this places on institutions.*

# Regional Accreditation and the Evaluation of Faculty

## An Untapped Resource: The Regional Accreditation Process

This entire issue of *Metropolitan Universities* is devoted to the importance of looking anew at the totality of faculty work and all its scholarly manifestations, as urged by Ernest Lynton and me in our 1987 book, *New Priorities for the University*. The good news is that, thanks largely to cogency and visibility given to this issue by the publication in 1990 of Ernest Boyer's *Scholarship Reconsidered*, the challenge of evaluating faculty professional service and teaching has come under closer scrutiny and is being given more serious attention. The not so good news is we still have a long way to go.

In searching for more equitable evaluative mechanisms for teaching and professional service, there are various vehicles that can be effectively utilized by institutions. In an age when our universities are facing increasing accountability from multiple sources, regional accreditation, at least as we know it today, can be instrumental in ensuring that such faculty work is appropriately evaluated. This article seeks to illuminate how universities can effectively employ the regional accreditation process in striving to find legitimate means and credible mechanisms for more equitably evaluating faculty teaching and professional work.

The regional accreditation process employs a clearly articulated set of criteria against which colleges and universities are evaluated, namely, standards for accreditation. These standards are generated by means of a consultative process involving all member institutions and applied to

the evaluation process by the respective commission in each regional association that deals with higher education institutions. To maintain accreditation, colleges and universities must demonstrate that these criteria have been adequately met.

Underscoring the accreditation process is the fundamental precept that the structures and programs of each institution are in concert with and serve to fulfill its stated mission and purposes, which serve as the benchmark against which an institution is evaluated. Accordingly, higher education commissions of regional accreditation bodies expect that the goals and objectives of each college and university are concrete and realistic, and define the educational and other dimensions of the institution, including scholarship, research, and public service. In determining their mission, institutions are further expected by accreditation associations to define those aims and emphases which reflect their particular character and individuality, and to stress their interrelationships. The connection between mission and structures is explicitly asserted in the standards of the North Central Association (NCA) which state that mission and purposes provide a framework for administration and communication, and are reflected in such activities as the retention, tenure, and promotion of faculty (1994). Faculty seek congruence between the institution's espoused mission and actual practice. Accreditation reinforces that precept.

Perhaps nowhere is the language in accreditation standards more definitive with regard to the importance of achieving compatibility between the institution's expectations of faculty work and how faculty are in fact evaluated and rewarded for such work than in one of the components of the Standard on Faculty promulgated by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC). Unambiguous in tone, with clarity in meaning, the Standard states that accredited institutions are to employ "evaluative criteria (which) reflect the mission and purposes of the institution and the importance it attaches to the various responsibilities of faculty members, e.g., teaching, scholarship, creative activities, research, and professional and community service. The institution has equitable and broad-based procedures for such evaluation, in which its expectations are stated clearly and weighted appropriately for use in the evaluative process." (1992, p. 20)

### **Professional Service**

Let us look first at the accreditation process in relationship to professional service. In this context, professional service refers "exclusively to work that draws upon one's professional expertise and is an outgrowth of one's academic discipline. In fact, it is composed of the same activities as traditional teaching and research but directed toward a different audience. In essence, where traditional teaching and research are directed toward contributions to the creation of knowledge, service as defined herein refers to the same contributions directed toward knowledge for society's welfare" (Elman & Smock, 1985, p. 12).

What in fact do our respective regional accreditation associations say about professional service in general and how it should be evaluated? Not surprisingly, there is considerable variation among the regional accrediting associations in addressing this issue. This inconsistency in the way professional service or any form of service is defined within the accreditation community reflects the academy's failure to come to grips with what is meant by professional service and what role it should play in our universities. Whereas specific references to service are explicit in almost every region's standards for accreditation, the notion of professional service is often more implicit. Specific reference to the evaluation of faculty professional service work is made in the standards on faculty and instructional staff of

NEASC, the Northwest Association (Northwest), the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), the Middle States Association (MSA), and the Southern Association of Schools and Colleges (SACS).

WASC, for instance, provides the following rather extensive definition. By public service is meant “a function accepted by nearly all publicly supported institutions and many independent colleges and universities.” Such service is regarded as being “of a practical nature to the external (non-academic) community — local, regional, national, or international.” Moreover such activity is regarded as including “public lectures and performances, various forms of applied research, non-credit courses, and agricultural or other similar forms of extension.” It includes only those activities in concert with the institution’s purposes and capabilities (WASC, 1988, p. 204).

The goals of public service, according to MSA and Northwest, are presumed to be realistically determined in light of such factors as the purpose for which the institution was founded, the point of view it represents, the community in which it is located, the constituencies it serves, the needs... of its community and clientele, and the institution’s resources (MSA, 1990, p. 10 and Northwest, 1992, p. 27). In the spirit of fostering stronger university linkages with its respective task environment, WASC proclaims that “faculty are encouraged to provide professional expertise as a service to the public” (WASC, p. 39).

Diverse in nature and application, professional service activities may be incorporated within various areas of institutional operation. Clearly the way professional service is evaluated is inextricably linked to the manner in which the institution recognizes such work. Historically, American higher education institutions, particularly the land grant universities, embraced service as one of three fundamental functions integral to the mission of the institution. Indeed, in many higher education institutions, the service function is not only manifested in the professional work in which faculty engage, but even more so through continuing education and other special instructional activities. Under its Standard on Continuing Education and Special Instructional Activities, SACS asserts that “where continuing education and other special instructional activities exist, including public service functions, they should be integral components of the institution’s total commitment.” Regardless of whether these activities are located in academic or administrative units, it is required that “recognition, support and coordination of all such activities should be achieved regardless of the particular administrative framework” (SACS, 1992, p. 57).

Having recognized that many institutions in fulfilling their overall mission and objectives, as well as their public and community service demands, will engage in a variety of continuing education or outreach activities, one of the Southern Association’s Standards requires that “an adequate and qualified faculty and staff” be provided to support these activities. Moreover, the Standard explicitly stipulates that “full time faculty and staff [assigned to such activities] should be accorded the same recognition and benefits as other faculty and staff members of the institution” (SACS, p. 58). Without equivocation, this region’s criteria explicitly state that “recognition and service in these activities should be considered in the tenure and promotion evaluation of participating full time faculty members” (Ibid).

Accreditation standards often embody criteria that are more concrete and proactive in explicating the necessity of evaluating faculty professional service/outreach activities than are policies formulated at the institutional level. Witness the language of several of the regional accrediting associations. Concerned that institutions have in place an ongoing, orderly, systematic, and appropriate process of fac-

ulty evaluation to ensure the quality of educational programs and instruction, institutions, according to the Northwest Association, are expected to utilize "multiple indices" in the continuous evaluation of faculty performance which should be "related to the role of the faculty member in carrying out the mission of the institution. " Among the examples of indices is "the evaluation of service of the profession, the school and community" (Northwest, p. 67).

Reaffirming that stance in another region of the country, the Western Association, under its Standard on Faculty and Staff, states that faculty evaluation — promotion and tenure — is to be based on such multiple criteria as scholarship, research productivity, and service to the academic or professional communities (WASC pp. 33,57).

Professional service is likewise encouraged by the NEASC by virtue of its dual conceptualization of scholarship, on the one hand, and faculty work on the other. According to NEASC's Standard on Programs and Instruction, all faculty are expected to pursue scholarship conceived of as a multifaceted phenomenon. The denotation of scholarship as including "the ongoing application, utilization and dissemination of existing knowledge as well as creative activity both within and outside the classroom," gives credence to faculty professional service. This stance toward faculty work is solidly buttressed in the Standard on Faculty, which links professional service with "faculty assignments and workloads which... are equitably determined to allow faculty members adequate time... to participate in scholarship, research and service compatible with the mission and purposes of the institution" (NEASC, p. 19).

### Institutional Compliance

These various excerpts from accreditation standards clearly indicate that regional associations recognize the importance of professional service. Of course, they do not mandate the extent to which colleges and universities should engage in such activities. But the standards are unambiguously clear as the need for consistency between rhetoric and policy. If an institution makes explicit reference to service or professional service in its stated mission and purposes, then they must consider such work in their system of faculty evaluation and rewards. The standards for regional accreditation provide internal and external leverage for the development of institutional policies and procedures that will guide the university in evaluating faculty work, and lead to an inclusive and functional faculty reward structure. If colleges and universities make eloquent pronouncements proclaiming the importance and necessity of professional service activities, then they will be expected to establish operative, formal policies and procedures that undergird the faculty evaluation system.

What then would an institution have to do to be in compliance with several of the regions' accreditation standards? What would an evaluation team be justified in asking faculty and administrators about their faculty evaluation system during the course of a comprehensive evaluation site visit? And, finally, what kinds of indicators would a commission on institutions of higher education of a regional accrediting association be looking for in ascertaining whether there is compatibility between its standards for accreditation and a university's policies and practices?

First, it is important to point out that there is no one best way to develop such a system. There are, nonetheless, two fundamental precepts that underscore the process: one, that the goals and objectives of the evaluation structure are in

concert with the goals and objectives of the institution; and, two, that the evaluation system reflects as much as possible the goals and expectations of individual faculty members. Implicit here is the dual notion that not all faculty will necessarily engage in professional service work; and, that faculty may pursue such work at different stages in their career.

Institutional policies and procedures for evaluating professional service need to take into account the context in which the university operates and the public it serves. The review for accreditation would inquire whether there has been an appropriate and effective process of dialogue in which faculty and administrators have engaged, and whether this process has led to adequate clarity with regard to questions and issues such as the following:

**(1) Expectations and Goals.**

What are faculty expectations and goals with regard to professional service?

What are the administration's expectations with regard to professional service?

What are the expectations of legislators, executive agencies, the public the institution serves, business leaders, and advocacy groups from the university in terms of service?

**(2) Definitional Issues.**

Insofar as service is probably the least well defined component of the university's mission, it is important that each university come to grips with what is meant by professional service, and what constitutes such activities. Policies need to specify whether such work includes activity on the campus as well as off, paid as well as unpaid, and whether it includes service to one's discipline, and if so, of what kind.

**(3) Determining Beneficiaries/Clients.**

Who should be the beneficiaries of such service? Does service to any prospective client qualify as appropriate faculty work? Should parameters be set regarding what organizations or groups constitute legitimate clients? Are some publics or recipients of such faculty service more important to the institution's mission, or to the institution's status in the state or region, than others?

**(4) Workload Concerns.** How much time should a faculty member devote to professional service? How is this determined? Is the number of hours engaged in such work equivalent to hours teaching, to hours in the research lab? When in the course of a faculty member's affiliation with the institution is it determined?

**(5) Documentation.** The sine qua non for ultimately equitably evaluating and rewarding faculty for their professional service activities is adequately and appropriately documenting that work. This is imperative for two reasons. First, the structural mechanisms for evaluating the quality level of professional activity must be the same as, or at the very least, compatible with the mechanisms for evaluating teaching and research. Second, only by providing adequate documentation of professional work can it actually be appropriately evaluated. The university's policies need to provide a blueprint for documenting such work. Systematic methods must be developed for determining relevant information regarding performance of scholarly applied work. Policies must state what forms of documentation are expected and acceptable for submission in the promotion and tenure process. Such formal means of documentation as contractual agreements, memoranda of understanding, and letters of communication between faculty members and contractors can be used in the evaluation process.

**(6) Evaluation.** Two components are significant here: the criteria applied in the evaluation process and the evaluators. What criteria will be applied in determin-

ing the quality and value of the professional service performed? Who will determine the criteria? Will they be uniform throughout the university or will they vary from school to school and from department to department? Should external evaluators be brought into the evaluative decision making process? If so, who should determine whose expertise is relevant to the evaluative process and what role should the expert(s) play in the process?

## Teaching

Recent discussions of faculty roles and rewards have not only focused on professional service, but also on teaching. The quality of the faculty's teaching or its effectiveness has come under serious scrutiny, with growing attention to more rigorous evaluation of how well faculty members are performing in the classroom and how generally effective they are as teachers.

Once again, the regional accrediting associations provide a critical leverage in requiring institutions to demonstrate that their faculty are engaged in effective teaching. In addressing the issue of teaching, the regional accrediting associations proceed on the dual premise that "effective teaching is seen as a dimension of institutional excellence" (MSA, p. 6), and that in determining whether an institution is accomplishing its educational and other purposes appropriate evidence includes courses and academic programs that are characterized by effective teaching (NCA, p. 60).

In stating the importance of effective teaching as a key determinant of whether the institution is in fact meeting its mission and purposes, the regional accrediting associations take the necessary, initial steps toward ensuring that (a) teaching is actually afforded the value and legitimacy consummate with its designated role within the institution's articulated mission and purposes; and that (b) faculty are engaged in effective teaching.

However, if "in the final analysis," as the Northwest Association puts it, "the performance of the faculty determines the educational quality of the institution" (p. 64), then each institution needs to have a structure in place for the continuing evaluation of faculty performance and as importantly "for the equitable recognition of faculty effectiveness" (p. 64). Indeed, as the Western Association in its Standard on Educational Programs states, it is incumbent upon the institution "to demonstrate its commitment to high standards of teaching and scholarship," through the provision of adequate resources to evaluate and improve the quality of instruction (WASC, p. 25).

Several of the regional accrediting associations explicitly posit these above mentioned mandates. Concerned with ensuring that institutions endeavor to enhance the quality of teaching on an ongoing basis, the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, for example, addresses the need to evaluate teaching both in its Standards on Programs and Instruction and in Faculty, thereby reaffirming the integral link between the quality of the instruction an institution is delivering to its students and the performance of its faculty. Recognizing the variance of students' capabilities and learning needs, the New England Association in its Standard on Programs and Instruction and the Southern Association in its Standard on Educational Programs go further in encouraging experimentation with methods to improve instruction, and concomitantly require that institutions use adequate and reliable procedures to periodically and systematically assess the effectiveness of instruction. Moreover, these standards further require the institution both to use the results of these assessment efforts to improve instruction and to adequately support the ac-

complishment of these tasks (NEASC, p. 15; SACS, p. 26).

Regional accrediting associations by no means confine the importance of evaluating instruction to the undergraduate level. Overall, they concur with the Southern Association's affirmation that at the graduate level as well institutions need to undertake systematic evaluation of instruction, and revise the instructional process based on the results of that evaluation (SACS, p. 33).

As in the case of professional service, enhancing the quality of teaching is not likely to occur in any college or university without formal mechanisms and procedures that can guide the faculty evaluation process. An institution has to come to grips with what it needs to do to create a culture in which evidence is put forth that demonstrates how effectively faculty teach and provide instruction. In other words, institutions need to first assure as the New England Association stipulates in its Standard on Faculty that "faculty assignments and workloads are consistent with the institution's mission and purposes," and moreover, that they are equitably determined to allow faculty members adequate time to provide effective instruction... " (NEASC, p. 19). Then, the New England, Northwest, Southern, and Western Associations all indicate, it is necessary for institutions to conduct periodic, systematic evaluations of individual faculty members. Moreover, it is necessary for the evaluative criteria against which the performance of each faculty member is measured to be made known to all concerned (SACS). In addition, these evaluative criteria need to reflect the mission and purposes of the institution and the importance it attaches to the various responsibilities of faculty members, such as teaching. Regardless of who is involved in the evaluation process, it is critical that the institution has equitably and broadly-based evaluation procedures "in which its expectations are stated clearly and weighted appropriately for use in the evaluative process" (NEASC, p. 20). And, in an age when deferred maintenance needs and aging equipment are increasingly becoming the nemesis of many of our universities, the Western Association of Schools and Colleges without ambiguity declares that "the institution provides facilities that enable faculty members to teach effectively" (WASC, p. 57).

Clearly, all the regional accrediting associations provide numerous incentives and official mandates for ensuring that faculty are appropriately and equitably evaluated for their teaching. To comply with the criteria, universities can undertake procedures similar to those previously explicated with regard to professional service.

## Conclusion

For a policy setting group that traditionally has not been regarded as a change agent, the regional accrediting community clearly articulates various criteria that explicitly recognize the importance of professional service and teaching in our universities, and, perhaps even more importantly, holds institutions to equitably evaluating and rewarding faculty for such work in accordance with their own stated mission and purposes. One of the time honored characteristics of accreditation is its aim at ensuring that an institution's practices are consistent with its publicly stated policies.

It is up to the universities both to comply with the accreditation standards and to match reality with their own rhetoric which, more often than not, heralds the importance of professional service as well as teaching, and the merit of faculty engaging in such work. It is more than an issue of responsible management and educational effectiveness. It is a matter of pure and simple integrity.

**Note:** The views contained herein are the author's own and do not necessarily represent those of NEASC or any other regional accreditation association.

### ***Suggested Reading***

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