

## *A Strategy for Evaluating Academic Administrators*

Raoul A. Arreola, Ph.D.

### Summary Overview:

1. **Identify appropriate evaluative constituencies.** Common constituencies include:
  - a. Internal office staff of the Administrator-To-Be-Evaluated (ATBE)
  - b. Staff of other administrator's whose work is directly impacted by the work of the ATBE's internal office staff
  - c. Faculty within the ATBE's unit
  - d. Faculty directly impacted by the actions of the ATBE even though they may not be in the administrator's unit
  - e. Administrators who are peers in the sense that their position is approximately at the same level and who report to the same supervisor as the ATBE
  - f. Other administrators whose assignment brings them into professional contact with the ATBE and/or the ATBE's internal office staff.
  - g. The ATBE's supervisor
2. **Develop List of Possible Descriptors.** Develop a list of qualities, characteristics, and behaviors that both the administrators to be evaluated, and the people within a given evaluative constituency, agree are descriptive of a good academic administrator. In the case of the supervisor, that list will have most likely already been defined by the position description.
3. **Determine Consensus List of Descriptors.** Develop a consensus list of qualities, characteristics, and behaviors by selecting those statements that at least 60% of both the administrators to be evaluated and the constituents who will be providing the evaluative information select as being descriptive of a good academic administrator.
4. **Develop Questionnaire(s)/ Rating Form(s)** that reflects the consensus list of qualities, characteristics and descriptors. Various forms may have to be developed as different consensus lists of descriptors emerge for different types of administrators.
5. **Develop Feedback Mechanism.** Establish appropriate feedback mechanisms to report the evaluative information to the administrator. This mechanism should maintain the anonymity of the individual constituent and should report only statistical summaries of the responses made by those completing the questionnaire.
6. **Develop Support Policies** and appropriate procedures and support mechanisms to assist the administrator in both enhancing those strengths and/or overcoming those weaknesses detected by the evaluation procedure.
7. **Link Performance to Reward Structure.** Develop policies that clearly relate performance evaluation data to the administrative reward structure. Link pay raise, promotion, continuation appointment, and termination decisions clearly and unambiguously to the information resulting from administrator evaluation. Establish specific performance evaluation criteria for each decision.

### Rationale

Unlike the evaluation of faculty performance, wherein the measurement of such difficult to define dimensions as teaching effectiveness or ability to promote learning are involved, the evaluation of university administrators

requires the assessment of fairly specific and observable personal characteristics and accomplishments. In order to reasonably assess administrative effectiveness it is first necessary to realize that such effectiveness is a product of an interactive relationship between the administrator and the various constituencies impacted by the administrator's performance; in essence it is a social quality that must be assessed in terms of social interaction (Remmers and Hobson, 1951). Thus the perceptions of those who interact with the administrator must be considered as an important component of an administrator evaluation system. In addition there are critical non-social-interactive components of total administrative effectiveness that require a more structured form of evaluation. Such non social-interactive components include the administrator's ability to accomplish their unit's mission with the resources provided, or the administrator's ability to select the most efficacious means of approaching the solution to a problem. The evaluation of these non-socially interactive functions can be accomplished by conventional means such as those employed in program evaluation and cost benefit analyses. In this regard, it is relatively easy to tell whether an administrator's unit has stayed within its budget or whether it has accomplished its mission. It is also relatively easy to ascertain whether a unit failed in its mission because it was allocated insufficient funds or because the funds were misused or mismanaged by the administrator. These facets of administrative activity are important to consider and evaluate but require a fairly intimate knowledge of the responsibilities, resources and restraints under which the administrator must work. For this reason, the evaluation of these activities is best carried out by the administrator's supervisor or supervisory board. However, in a college or university setting, the unique role of an administrator in establishing the tone, morale and even the very spirit of the unit being supervised, is of such import to the successful operation of the university as a whole that the social-interactive characteristics of a university administrator should be among the primary variables to be considered in any evaluative process.

Since a college/university deals not only with the development and transmission of knowledge but also in the formulation and maintenance of societal attitudes, goals and morés, the importance of the "atmosphere" an administrator creates cannot be over-stressed. The strength of a university lies not simply in its financial resources, but in the attitude, dedication and intellectual motivation of its faculty, students and staff. Since the administrator is, in essence, the controller of resources and policies that affect the professional climate in which these three groups of people must work, an administrator can significantly affect the overall strength of an institution. It is important, therefore, to consider input from at least these three groups or constituencies in the development of a system for evaluating university administrators.

As with a faculty evaluation system, an Academic Administrator Evaluation system should include information from a variety of appropriate sources or constituencies. In designing an academic administrator evaluation system the following sources/constituencies should be considered:

1. SUPERORDINATE: The administrator's supervisor or supervisory board (can provide information on the success of the administrator in accomplishing the unit's mission with consideration being given to the resources made available).

2. PEER academic administrators – others in the institution who hold the same or similar academic administrative positions (such as deans of other colleges or other department chairs within the same college).
3. SUBORDINATE:
  - a. The administrator's immediate office staff;
  - b. Faculty, including those who may not be under the direct administrative authority of the administrator. This evaluation should be in terms of assessing how well the administrator is perceived to be discharging those duties of his position that may directly, or indirectly, influence the attitude and performance of the faculty.
  - c. The administrator's organizational subordinates NOT on the immediate office staff. For example, a Dean should be evaluated not only by the office staff, but also by all department heads under the Dean's authority and (perhaps) the department heads' office staff.
4. OTHER NON-SUBORDINATE;
  - a. Career staff or students who are directly affected as a consequence of the administrator's overall responsibilities and duties. For example, the position of Registrar has a constituency that includes faculty, staff and students. A proper evaluation strategy for this position would include input from all three sources.
  - b. Other impacted constituencies – such as career staff or students who are directly affected as a consequence of the administrator's overall responsibilities and duties. For example, the position of Registrar has a constituency that includes faculty, staff and students. A proper evaluation strategy for this position would include input from all three sources.
5. SELF - the administrator being evaluated can provide information that includes a self-assessment of his/her performance within the perceived environment.

#### Developing the Evaluation System

Having shaped the rationale for evaluating administrators, a two-fold problem requires solution before an administrator evaluation system can be implemented. Basically the problem is to determine (1) What are the specific components of administrative performance that should be evaluated, and (2) Who should do the evaluating for each administrative position?

Experience in the development of faculty evaluation systems had shown that unless the individuals to be evaluated have meaningful input in answering these basic questions, the evaluation system would not be readily accepted or trusted. An appropriate strategy for answering these questions should include systematically seeking such input from the administrators themselves. Since administrator schedules are traditionally quite tight, it is generally difficult to obtain in-depth reviews from them as to what specific components of their performance should be evaluated. In the event that such is the case, one effective strategy is to prepare a broad list of administrative performance components and ask the administrators to check those that apply to their respective positions.