

Block B Project: Academic Staff – Performance Excellence June 30 – July 24, 2014

Charge

The goal of the performance excellence process at CC is to ensure that supervisors and staff understand and communicate openly about performance expectations and goals and that staff have opportunities to develop the skills and abilities needed to successfully contribute to the college's mission.

Since the implementation of the new performance excellence process two years ago, concerns have been raised about the effectiveness of centralizing the evaluation for academic office staff with just the department chair and methods used to ensure there is consistency and understanding on the use of the performance rankings for core academic office staff functions.

President Tiefenthaler has commissioned a block-project to review the performance excellence process for academic office staff to ensure it is administered effectively and to recommend alternatives for gathering and assessing performance behaviors and outcomes, and to develop consistent performance ranked ratings.

Project Members

Barbara J. Wilson, Human Resources Director, Chair
Lisa Brommer, Human Resources Associate Director
Nancy Heinecke, Office Coordinator, Economics & Business, Social Sciences
Mandy Sulfrian, Staff Assistant, Geology, Natural Sciences
Stormy Burns, Office Coordinator, Music, Humanities
Sharon Neely, Staff Assistant, Environmental Science, Interdisciplinary
Pam Leutz, Assistant to the Dean of the College/Dean of the Faculty
Gail Murphy-Geiss, Associate Professor, Sociology, FEC Chair
Tomi-Ann Roberts, Professor, Psychology

Project Activity

The group spent 2 meetings for the faculty and staff members to present their perspectives and experiences of the current performance evaluation activities for office staff only. It was agreed the existing performance evaluation process works for other academic staff whose responsibilities and performance are directly related to the academic programs (i.e. technical directors, paraprofessionals, shop supervisors, etc.). Staff members also reached out to other academic office staff to garner their input.

Faculty perspectives included:

- Most department chairs lack the experience and knowledge to effectively perform all administrative responsibilities and would prefer not to be responsible for many of the personnel related functions including performance evaluations. Some faculty would prefer not to have the supervisor role since it is time consuming and they lack the knowledge on essential functions and performance expectations for the academic office staff positions.
- The relationship between supervisor and employee is many times awkward in the academic departments because the newly appointed (and for some returning faculty)

department chairs rely heavily on the academic office staff position to guide and train them in their administrative responsibilities and consequently any help provided is considered exceptional performance. The relationship is considered a partnership and a team.

- When turnover occurs among academic support staff, the department chairs do not have the knowledge to provide substantive training to the new employee and so must rely on other academic office staff to step in or leave it up to the new employee to independently learn the job. In some academic departments and buildings, summer coverage diminishes due to the reduced work schedules by the academic office staff and consequently hampers timely and available office support needs.
- There is minimal compensation for serving as the department chair which further serves to impact the chair's willingness to perform administrative functions.
- Expecting chairs to attend training on performance evaluations will not work as most do not want to be chairs or conduct the evaluation process.
- Requiring department chairs to rotate doesn't make good sense since some are good at it and want to or should remain in the role. (Staff concur).

The staff perspectives that were shared included:

- Department chairs are our supervisors and therefore should be doing our evaluations. They should do this because they know the daily, blockly, and annual tasks/stresses of the academic office staff. Department chairs need training; some don't mind the performance evaluation responsibility, they just don't know how to do it.
- Staff want department chairs to remain in their role of evaluators. Some department chairs don't know what other academic staff do so are unable to judge how much work a task really takes, how many tasks are performed in other departments, and what are the tasks
- If department chairs cannot evaluate us properly then they should be taken out of the supervisory position completely.
- Some department chairs view the staff performance evaluation process similar to teaching and establishing a grading system; "you'll never get an A".
- The staff do not like being evaluated on a merit system since documenting their performance and outcomes implies one has to prove the work has been done. Likewise, having to identify goals is difficult because, in their opinion, their work is relatively the same every year and their primary focus is to "do/take as much of the administrative responsibilities from the department chair as possible so they can teach". Referencing the department goals to incorporate into individual goals is a possibility. "We constantly get feedback about our work during the year. The annual review is just a formality that we have to endure just to validate the work we do."
- Staff may list 2 colleagues who can provide substantive feedback on their performance. Department chairs should ask the people listed for feedback as well as other faculty in the department who engaged with and received services from the office support position.
- Creating a checklist of core tasks that are performed and space to list additional tasks accomplished during the academic year might assist department chairs to be specific in their review of performance and know what has been accomplished. Two sample documents were provided and are attached.

Alternatives were raised and discussed based on their practicality, benefit, and acceptance. One suggestion is to mirror the faculty review process by creating a peer review committee made up of staff representing each of the academic divisions to review all staff performance evaluations and ratings. The evaluations would still be completed by the staff and department chair. The purpose of the peer review committee would be to compare ratings and promote consistency in the rating outcomes across the academic divisions. From staff, there were flaws with this suggestion since it creates an atmosphere of competition between the academic office staff that is contrary to the existing collaborative and peer relationship, it involves individuals who do not know the scope of their responsibilities, and is a worse alternative than the current process of department chairs conducting the evaluation.

Another alternative raised was to centralize the evaluation process to the dean's office but did not receive favorable consideration by the staff because it required someone to conduct the evaluation without any knowledge of actual performance and job responsibilities. Further, it would not be helpful to put the burden of the evaluation onto the Dean who is not in the position to know any more than the Chair of the Department. The Dean's Office is not a workable solution.

Project Recommendation

Two options were discussed that offer additional performance evaluation review to promote consistency in the performance ratings and provide greater input on performance activities during the year.

Option - Select 3-4 faculty to serve on the mid-level evaluation team. These faculty may be department chairs from each division or other faculty to be determined. The purpose of this group is to review all academic staff evaluations completed by the Chairs for consistent application of the ratings. This option received favorable consideration from the staff though faculty members were not completely in favor of giving more administrative tasks to faculty.

Option - Identify lead academic support staff within the 4 academic divisions. This option was viewed as favorable to the faculty members and staff. The leads will remain in their academic departments with additional lead duties to work together to review the evaluations completed by the Chairs to ensure that ratings are applied consistently and accurately based on the work that is being done. Other responsibilities of the lead staff were discussed and may include mentoring and training of new support staff, being the first line of support for faculty who are without summer staff, helping to address performance needs of support staff, and ensuring an equitable distribution within the division. The lead staff member will be identified through an internal recruitment process and will be compensated for the lead role. This option will require budget resources.

Other Recommendations

Staff and faculty members of the project team identified that attention is needed to examine and update job title, bands, and salaries that will accurately reflect the scope of responsibilities of academic office support positions. The renovation of changes should include having different position levels based on responsibilities that start with the basic core functions for an academic office support position and increases incrementally based on

department needs and individual job-related skills. This approach will offer professional development and growth while meeting the unique needs of each academic department.

Human Resources informed the group they are planning to conduct an analysis this fall of existing job duties of administrative and academic support positions to identify appropriate job titles, identify opportunities for a tiered system that allows for job advancement, and identify a model that allows for equitable distribution of work and supervision.

Examine the current performance evaluation timeframe and modify it to conduct the evaluations in Block 5/early spring rather than later and conduct the additional evaluation review with the leads in Block 6.

Number of Academic Office staff by division:

Interdisciplinary: 5

Humanities: 8

Social Sciences: 7

Natural Sciences: 7