Best Practices for (Current) PAR Evaluations

- **Change the departmental perspective on the PAR process to one that is focused on providing feedback to faculty in an effort to help faculty improve.**

  There is considerable variability across departments in the nature of the feedback. A couple of departments have relatively long PAR evaluations (3 pages) that summarize each faculty's major accomplishments in each dimension and provide some evaluative feedback to help faculty improve. Some departments, for example, let faculty know that they should aim for higher impact publication or do things to increase the national exposure of their creative works. Other departments simply re-state what was on a faculty PAR form and then do not provide any evaluative comments or suggestions. At the very least, a department should identify the quality or national visibility of the activities. It is especially important to provide feedback/guidance to TT faculty.

- **Pay special attention to TT faculty and give specific and constructive feedback to help guide them.**
- **Provide separate ratings for scholarship, teaching and service. Have clear guidelines for percent of effort for each dimension.**

  Providing separate evaluations for each dimension provides faculty with more guidance about dimensions in which they are doing well and dimensions on which they might want to focus in the coming year. The final evaluation can be based on these three evaluations and weighted according to the percent of effort for each dimension. The workload distribution for most tenured/tenure-track (TN/TT) faculty is 40/40/20 – 40% scholarship, 40% teaching, and 20% service. Evaluating each dimension and computing the final PAR evaluation based on workload distribution allows the PARs to reflect differences in workload across faculty based on roles (e.g., chair, graduate advisor) and type of appointment (TN/TT, Professor of Instruction). For example, a non-TT faculty who has no scholarship expectations, teaches a 4/4 load and has some service duties might be rated as 80% teaching and 20% service.[1] This also allows for adjustments based on role the person plays in a department. The individual serving as chair, for example, might be evaluated on all 3 dimensions but using a 20/20/60 distribution weighting to reflect the higher service expectation for a chair.

- **Evaluate chairs on research, teaching and service (administration)**.

1 Although the PAR is not required for these non-TN/TT faculty, they are required to be evaluated. Having everyone do the PAR and rating according to workload may be simpler than conducting a different type of evaluation for non-TN/TT faculty.

- **Establish guidelines/standards that indicate what is expected for each dimension.**

  A few departments have clear expectations about what is required to earn different scores on each dimension. Although it may require upfront work to do this, they have a few advantages over the long run. First, they should make the evaluation process easier because they provide the evaluation committee with clear guidelines that can be used to help with the review (i.e., similar to a grading rubric). Second, they are an efficient way of providing feedback because the evaluation committee can simply invoke the guideline and faculty will know the reason for their score and also what might be done to increase their score on a dimension. Third, they may help alleviate concerns that different individuals are evaluated according to different standards. If guidelines are used, they should be explicitly stated and consistently used in each evaluation.

  One approach for generating guidelines is to have a comprehensive system that specifies what individuals need to do to achieve different scores for each dimension. For example, a listing of criteria that must be present for a faculty to obtain a "3" for teaching, additional things must be done to earn a "4", et cetera. Another way to do guidelines is to specify what is required for meeting a standard score.[2] Having established criteria for a standard score is a little simpler to implement and then can be used as a guide to help identify instances where faculty performance exceeds (or falls short of) the standard.

- **Have the entire evaluation committee review the set of departmental evaluations to help insure that they are consistent in format and that the evaluative tone of the text matches the score.**

  The evaluations within departments sometimes vary substantially both in format (e.g., some use bullet points and others are in paragraph form) and in their evaluative tone. The latter creates instances in which one individual has a lower score than another, but the evaluative language used to describe that person is more positive.

- **Require both the committee and chair to provide at least some constructive evaluative feedback.**

  Across departments, there was variability in whether chairs provided a separate evaluative rating and/or written feedback. Some chairs simply concurred with the evaluation and did not provide independent written feedback, others provided feedback and did not suggest a different evaluation, et cetera. Because chairs frequently have a different perspective of a faculty's work than departmental peers (especially about service), the evaluations that had written feedback from both peers and the chair provided

2. Based to the 5-point rating scale that is used for PAR evaluations, the most appropriate "standard" score is "3" which is defined as meeting expectations. In practice, however, faculty evaluations are "4" or greater in most departments. Thus, a department might want opt to define the standard as a "4" which might equate to "exceeds expectations."

the most feedback. This additional feedback is helpful both to the faculty member and also the Dean.

- **Require tenure-track assistant professors to include additional materials with their PAR.**

  At a minimum, TT faculty should provide materials that will have to be submitted with their tenure packet such as a vita, syllabi, and peer evaluations of their teaching.

- **Use metrics other than just student evaluation questionnaires to assess teaching**.

  Although student evaluations can contribute important information, they have limitations and should NOT be used as the sole way of evaluating teaching. Research has shown, for example, that student evaluations are based on things like grade distribution (faculty who give more "As" are evaluated more positively), course content (e.g., quantitative courses tend to get lower evaluations), course size (smaller courses get higher evaluations), gender of instructors (males get higher evaluations), et cetera. Research has also demonstrated that student evaluations are NOT related to learning outcomes. Thus, departments should supplement student evaluations with other metrics.

- **Use a multi-year window to evaluate scholarship**.

  Because of the time it can take to generate a book and even articles and the nature of the review process, there is considerable variability in scholarship output across years. To help with this, it may be useful to use a multi-year window to evaluate scholarship (but not necessarily teaching or service). This can be done in different ways. A few departments use a "points" system and allow points to carry-over to the next year. Another department has faculty list all scholarship over a three year period. The latter system has the advantage of allowing reviewers to see a trajectory.

- **Consider using decimals to create more variability in the scores**.

  Many but not all departments use intermediate numbers (e.g., 3.5 & 4.5). Rating scales work well when the entire range of the scale is used. The problem with our current scale, however, is that "3" is defined as "meets expectations" and the vast majority of faculty are doing better than "meets expectations". Thus, the 5-point rating scale now becomes a 2-point scale when just use the whole numbers of "4" and "5". Allowing people to use ½ points can help because it allows our current scale to became a 4-point scale at the top end (i.e., 3.5, 4, 4.5, 5).

A Different Way of Doing PAR Evaluations: Goal Setting

The above review provides feedback on our current process, but a couple some of us think that a more significant overhaul of the review process that incorporated goal setting it might be better. This is a more significant change but one that can be incorporated into your PAR process if you desire (two departments appear to do some of this, but it does not appear to be a significant part of the evaluation process in either department).   Goal setting appears to be common in other institutions (see below) and is considered a best practice. For this to work, we think that it should involve multiple steps.

- Goals should reflect the department, College, and University mission.
- The goals that faculty set should be evaluated to make sure they (1) are aligned with the departmental mission and expectations and (2) will facilitate each faculty's advancement at UTEP and in their discipline at the national level For example, we don't want someone setting the goal of "showing up to 50% of scheduled classes" and expecting a good evaluation the next year because the individual made it to "55% of scheduled classes". It will be especially important to evaluate the goals of TT faculty to ensure that successfully accomplishing the goals will be enough to earn them tenure and promotion.
- Progress toward goals should be reported and evaluated in the subsequent year. This process can be used to help provide feedback if people do not achieve their goals and should not be the sole determinate of the evaluation because external events can sometimes prevent faculty from achieving their goals.

Let's not re-invent the wheel

These are a few summaries of best practices from other institutions:

Iowa State: https://www.extension.iastate.edu/hr/files/page/files/FacultyEvaluation_0.pdf

Department chairs should consider the following:

1. Develop a written set of department goals to be used in annual performance evaluation that are shared with and made readily available to all faculty members.

2. Develop a faculty workload policy that is communicated to all faculty members.

3. Establish a set of performance criteria and standards for teaching, scholarly output, service, and outreach and engagement (where appropriate) that are clearly communicated to each faculty member.

4. Disseminate clearly described methods for evaluating excellence to the faculty prior to the submission of annual performance evaluation materials.

5. Involve faculty members in setting goals for themselves during performance reviews.

6. Discuss prior year performance evaluation and goals with the faculty member during the annual performance review process.

7. Utilize annual performance evaluations to draft career development plans (3 – 5 years) for all faculty members. Use annual evaluations to identify training, mentoring, and leave opportunities to help faculty members reach career goals.

8. Provide guidance on progress toward reappointment, promotion and/or tenure and clearly state in the review letter where appropriate

9. Encourage faculty members to self-appraise during the annual performance review process.

10. For faculty members with a joint appointment in another department, seek input from the other unit(s) in the annual performance evaluation.

Nevada Reno: https://www.unr.edu/Documents/administration-finance/hr/hr-faculty-eval/AcademicFacultyEvaluationTOOLKIT.pdf

Avoid common Pitfalls:

a) Avoid the "permanent halo or doghouse" effects by focusing on the current evaluation year rather than recalling past performances

b) Single aspects of a faculty member's performance should not determine their entire rating

c) All judgments must be supported by evidence

d) Evaluation requires more than description: An analysis of the relevant data and recommendations is critical

e) Remain focused on the performance of the faculty member and not be generous to faculty members based on the fact that they are new faculty or beginners

University of Iowa: https://provost.uiowa.edu/faculty-review-best-practices

- **Problem-Solving Orientation**: Suggest concrete and workable solutions for problems noted; cite the departmental, collegiate, or University resources that are available or will be provided to the faculty member to help address problems. For example, a faculty member with poor teaching evaluations could be encouraged to utilize the Center for Teaching or a faculty member who experienced significant delay in setting up his/her lab (especially if the department / college / University contributed in any way to the delay) might be provided with an RA for a semester to make up for the lost time.
- **Positive Recognition**: Congratulate faculty on notable achievements in teaching, research, and service, including the achievement of recognizing a problem and working to improve the deficiency.
- **Convey Expectations**: The faculty member should receive from the annual review a clear sense of the extent to which s/he is making progress towards meeting departmental and collegiate expectations for a positive reappointment, tenure, and/or promotion decision. Expectations can be communicated directly (e.g., "Professor G needs to be more active in writing up completed research for publication.") but also indirectly through expanded description. For example, "Professor W's published papers and those s/he plans to write do not duplicate each other, which is an important consideration in developing a body of research that will make a significant contribution to the field." OR "Professor B has assumed responsibility for a desirable mixture of courses during the two years at the University of Iowa, both required classes and electives drawing on his/her areas of expertise."
- **Balance**: The review should be a balanced appraisal, including description, critical evaluation, advice, and praise.

Documents from University of Michigan and Rochester Institute of Technology are attached.