Principles and Profiles of Good Practice in Assessment

Wednesday, September 23, 2009

1:00 PM – 2:00 PM (Eastern)
12:00 PM – 1:00 PM (Central)
11:00 AM – 12:00 PM (Mountain)
10:00 AM – 11:00 AM (Pacific)
(Times listed refer to daylight saving time)

Presented by:

Dr. Trudy W. Banta
Today's presenter:
Dr. Trudy W. Banta is professor of higher education and senior advisor to the chancellor for academic planning and evaluation at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis. She has developed and coordinated 21 national conferences and 15 international conferences on the topic of assessing quality in higher education. She has consulted with faculty and administrators in 46 states, Puerto Rico, South Africa, and the United Arab Emirates and has by invitation addressed national conferences on outcomes assessment in Canada, China, England, France, Germany, Spain and Scotland. Dr. Banta has edited 15 published volumes on assessment, contributed 26 chapters to published works, and written more than 200 articles and reports. She is the founding editor of Assessment Update, a bi-monthly periodical published since 1989. She has been honored for her work by the American Association for Higher Education, American College Personnel Association, American Productivity and Quality Center, Association for Institutional Research, National Council on Measurement in Education, and National Consortium for Continuous Improvement in Higher Education.

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Principles & Profiles of Good Practice in Assessment

Magna Online Seminar
September 23, 2009

Presented By
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Outline
- Background and organization of our project
- Detailed examples of good practice
- Conclusions

Designing Effective Assessment: Principles and Profiles of Good Practice

Trudy W. Banta
Elizabeth A. Jones
Karen E. Black

Jossey-Bass (Wiley)
2009
Profiles

- Invited over 1000
- Received 146
- Selected 49 for use in full
- Categorized all 146 and published Web sites

Types of Institutions Represented

- Doctoral and research universities
  - Private  7
  - Public  16 .......... 47%
- Master's  13 .......... 26%
- Baccalaureate  7 .......... 14%
- Associate  5 .......... 10%
- ACE  1 .......... 2%

Outline for Profiles

- Background and purpose
- Methods over ? years
- Resources required
- Findings
- Use of findings
- Impact of using findings
- Success factors
- Web sites
~ Organization ~

of Principles & Profiles

- Planning
  - Implementing
    - Improving & Sustaining

- Building a Scholarship of Assessment
  Banta & Associates
  Jossey-Bass 2002

Planning Principles

1. Engaging stakeholders
2. Connecting assessment to valued goals & processes
3. Creating a written plan
4. Timing assessment
5. Building a culture based on evidence
Planning Profiles

- Brigham Young University
  Campus Wiki for degree learning outcomes
- USMA at West Point
  Interdisciplinary teams assess 10 mission-related goals for learners
- Kennesaw State University
  2008 CHEA Award for linking assessment with planning, program review, faculty development

Implementation Principles

1. Providing leadership
2. Creating faculty/staff development
3. Assessing processes as well as outcomes
4. Communicating and using findings

Implementation Profiles

- California State University, Sacramento
  - Strong leadership, multiple methods
- Texas Christian University
  - Faculty learning communities
- Tompkins Cortland Community College
  - Capstone rubrics
**Improving/Sustaining Principles**

1. Providing credible evidence of learning to multiple stakeholders
2. Reviewing assessment reports
3. Ensuring use of results
4. Evaluating the assessment process

**Improving/Sustaining Profiles**

- San Jose State University
  - Specialists in each college, awards, learning outcomes in 5-year plans
- Hocking Technical College
  - Annual assessment work day
- Colorado State University
  - Integration of learning outcomes in online template for program reviews

**Implementation Categories for Profiles**

1. General education
2. Undergrad academic majors
3. Faculty/staff development
4. Use of technology
5. Program review
6. First year and civic engagement experiences
7. Student affairs
8. Community colleges
9. Graduate programs
What's New?
- Categories
  - Technology
  - Program review
  - First year experiences
  - Graduate programs
- Rubrics

What's Not New?
- Faculty Development and Buy In
- Leadership
- Years doing assessment –
  - 2 years or less: 42%
  - 3 - 5 years: 30%
- Profiles: 42%
- Assessment: 42%
- Institute: 23%

A Look At The Profiles
- Leadership 18%
- Faculty and staff development 18%
- Responsibility at unit level 33%
- Methods
  - Rubrics 37%
  - Surveys 33%
  - Electronic/technology 20%
  - Portfolios 14%
  - National standardized tests 8%
Assessment in General Education

- DePaul
- Iona College
- Kennesaw State
- North Carolina State
- Pace
- Tompkins Cortland C College
- University of Nebraska

Assessment in Major Fields

- Alverno
- Brigham Young
- Hocking College
- Illinois State
- Moravian College
- University of Akron
- University of Northern Iowa

Assessment in Graduate Programs

- Colorado State
- Johnson and Wales
- San Diego State
- Walden
Assessment in Community Colleges
- Baltimore County
- Hocking
- Miami Dade
- St. Louis

Assessment in Student Affairs
- Cal State – Sacramento
- Iona
- Penn State
- Truman State
- University of Alabama
- University of Hawaii
- University of Maryland

Faculty Development in Assessment
- College of St. Benedict & St. John’s University
- Ferris State
- Florida A&M
- Texas Christian
- University of South Florida
Use of Technology in Assessment
- American Council on Education
- Brigham Young
- Kennesaw State
- Medgar Evers College (CUNY)
- University of Akron
- University of South Florida

USMA @ West Point
6 Developmental Domains
1. Intellectual
2. Physical
3. Military
4. Social
5. Moral-ethical
6. Human spirit

USMA @ West Point
Intellectual Domain
10 Goals (write, speak, think; engineering, math, info tech)
A. Stated learner outcomes
   1. Standards
      a. Rubrics developed by faculty
USMA @ West Point
Interdisciplinary Goal Teams use
- Curriculum-embedded direct measures of learning
- Student surveys (fr., sr.)
- Graduate survey (3 years after)
- Employer surveys
- Employer focus groups

USMA @ West Point
Use of Assessment Findings
- Review of core curriculum
- Changes in warranted areas:
  History
  English
  Engineering
  Information Technology

Cal State-Sacramento (1)
Sources of Motivation for Assessment
1. New VP for Student Affairs
2. Reaccreditation looming
3. Enrollment & budget challenges
4. Pledge to become more data-driven and focused on student learning
Cal State-Sacramento (2)
1. Align department & division missions
2. Develop SMART goals, 1 for student learning
   • Specific
   • Measurable
   • Aggressive, yet attainable
   • Results-oriented
   • Timely

Cal State-Sacramento (3)
Measures
• Pre-post MC tests on policies, resources
• Essays with rubrics (reinstatement)
• Portfolios
• Observation of skills
  (Leadership, RA reports on scenarios, role-playing)

Cal State-Sacramento (4)
Findings
1. Some SLOs met
2. Some SLOs not met
3. Some measures not effective
4. Too few participants to assess
5. Too many participants to assess effectively
Cal State-Sacramento (5)

Use of Findings
1. Better training for RAs in reporting
2. Better training for peer mentors in orientation (emphasizing policies)
3. More time to discuss films
4. Better PowerPoint presentations
5. Increase participation in counseling
6. Redesign vague test items

Resources For Sustaining Assessment

1. Faculty release time
2. Stipends for faculty leaders
3. Assessment committee
4. New full-time assessment position created
5. External consultants

Resources For Sustaining Assessment

6. Financial resources to pay for tests and purchase surveys
7. Administrative support
8. Professional development
9. Technology
Sustaining Professional Development: Faculty Learning Communities

- Texas Christian University
  - Created faculty learning communities to address the following:
    a. identify and create assessment strategies
    b. share results of assessment processes
    c. discuss results to enhance teaching and learning experiences

Some Big Ideas

- Influence of accreditation is strong
- Engaging faculty may require extra pay
- Standardized tests of generic skills are not used alone
- Linking assessment with planning and program review works
- Impact is not measured in learning gains

Group Assessment Has Failed to Demonstrate Institutional Accountability

- Focus on improvement at unit level
- Rare aggregation of data centrally
- Too few faculty involved
- Involved faculty return to discipline
- HE scholars focused on K-12 assessment
**Employ Multiple Methods**

1. Direct
   - Projects, papers, tests, observations
2. Indirect
   - Questionnaires, interviews, focus groups
   - Unobtrusive measures
   - Syllabi, transcripts

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**Build Assessment into Valued Processes**

1. Assessment of learning
2. Curriculum review and revision
3. Survey research
4. Program review
5. Scholarship of Teaching & Learning
6. Evaluation of initiatives
7. Faculty development
8. Promotion & tenure
9. Rewards and recognition

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**Establishing a Culture of Evidence takes**

- Strong leadership
- Support
- Time
- Evidence that findings are used to guide improvements
Negotiating an Armistice in the Email Wars

By Jeffrey L. Buller, PhD

Email, along with ancillary forms of communication like instant messaging (IM) and Twitter, has greatly increased the speed and efficiency of people's ability to pass on information. Unfortunately, it has also escalated the intensity of what were once known as "memo wars": Someone who feels an injustice has been committed or a poor decision has been made sends a scathing email to the person regarded as responsible, copying others in an attempt to build support, draw attention to the severity of the problem, and express his or her righteous indignation. The recipient of the memo then responds in kind, answering the charges that have been made, posting a few countercharges, and generally increasing the heat of the exchange. The original author replies to this second memo and receives a response to the reply, and the whole scenario continues, with emotions building as the list of those copied on each successive memo grows.

When sent by interoffice mail or slipped under a door, written memos once caused this sequence of events to play out over a series of weeks, even months. But with the speed of electronic communication, a similar war conducted via email can escalate within a matter of minutes. Academic leaders who leave their offices to attend a meeting may return to find a dozen or more messages, each angrier than the last, and wonder how much valuable time has been wasted in this childish game of rhetorical one-upmanship.

Intervene immediately

Some administrative decisions call for immediate action, while other situations are best handled with a wait-and-see approach. The latter strategy, which is sometimes called "benign neglect," can be the best option when a supervisor's intervention could easily turn a small problem into a major disaster or when the probability of undesirable consequences is extremely high. But an email war is not one of the situations in which being passively observant is likely to lead to a successful result.

This kind of conflict intensifies on its own and quickly becomes a significant problem for everyone in the department or school. Even worse, other people can get dragged into the exchange of heated accusations, even if they initially tried only to provide a voice of reason in a debate that they saw becoming increasingly unreasonable.

If one or more of the people who are engaged in the email war report to you, your best strategy is usually to intervene immediately and in person. Send a gentle notice to the participants that they're engaging in a discussion that would be better handled face-to-face, appoint a time in the very near future when you can all meet about the matter, and instruct them not to continue the dialogue until you've had a chance to meet with them.

If some of the email warriors don't report to you, try to involve their supervisors in your discussion and present a united front. This approach has several advantages. For one thing, the very act of getting people to talk face-to-face rather than through written messages usually cools the intensity of the argument. People are far less likely to make outrageous statements to another person's face, particularly if "the boss" is in the room, than they are to write strongly worded messages. Second, if harsh statements are made, you can intervene immediately, cut off the remark before additional damage is done, discuss the reasons why the remark was inappropriate, and give the person a chance to make his or her point in a more constructive manner. Third, while email exchanges tend to exacerbate emotions the longer they continue, meeting in person will usually help passions dissipate, particularly if you make it clear that you're willing to keep talking about the matter until a resolution is found.

In your role as mediator, whenever you rephrase remarks in such a way that makes them less hostile or insulting, you're demonstrating to the participants how they can solve a conflict more cons-
The Economy and the Aging Professorate

By Robert Hill, EdD

If your institution is like mine, you have faculty colleagues who are getting “long in the tooth” and, until recently, were looking forward to soon enjoying a nice, quiet academic retirement after many years of loyal service to the college. Of course, this was before the collapse of the Federal National Mortgage Association (FNMA), commonly known as Fannie Mae, and the Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corporation (FHLMC), known as Freddie Mac. It was before the subprime mortgage meltdown, which was disastrous for Bear Stearns, one of the largest underwriters of mortgage bonds. It was long before September 2008, when Lehman Brothers, one of the most prestigious players on Wall Street, filed for bankruptcy protection and became one of the largest casualties of the global credit crisis. During the last year and a half, almost everyone in education has witnessed the hard-earned nest eggs disappear right in front of their educators’ eyes.

Colleges and universities both public and private are tightening their budgets as they see funding greatly reduced and their endowments plummet. Everyone is feeling the effects of the economic downturn. Students are nervous about large tuition increases, and they are anxious about the availability of state and federal financial aid funding. While higher education is hunkering down and some institutions have taken various measures (e.g., layoffs; curtailment or elimination of programs; larger classes; freezes on travel, salaries, and hiring; not filling vacated positions; raising the costs of benefits), faculty continue to teach and advise, engage in scholarly research, and give unselfishly to their institutions and campus communities.

The fact that the faculty is “graying” is a well-documented phenomenon that has been routinely reported in The Chronicle. The faculty who entered the academy in the ‘60s and ‘70s are now getting up there in years, and unfortunately they comprise the largest single category of the present faculty ranks. The retirement of the post–World War II baby boomer generation was originally expected to create a massive shortage of professors, necessitating replenishment of the faculty ranks. Now these older (and I certainly do not use this term disrespectfully) faculty colleagues are suddenly confronted with the realization that they might have to continue teaching and working for several more semesters than they had originally envisioned.

Additionally, many faculty who had their retirements invested in the greatly diminished stock market have had to come to the aid of both their elderly parents and their grown children due to the current economic recession. Many also feel trapped because they cannot sell their homes now and/or are confronted with owing more money than their homes are worth, and because their credit cards are maxed out.

When the quarterly statements from TIAA-CREF or AIG VALIC now come in the mail, people do not even want to open them because they become too depressed. It did not help the situation when Roger Ferguson, CEO of TIAA-CREF, wrote us on March 24, 2009, somberly stating, “It is likely that the effects of the recession will be with us for much of the year. Equity markets remain volatile, residential housing markets will continue to struggle, and unemployment will rise through 2009 and into 2010.”

The main academic resource of a
AGING PROFESSORIATE...
From Page 2

college or university is its faculty. An institution's fundamental strength and 
academic reputation derive from the overall quality of its faculty. Just ask us 
faculty members and we will proudly 
affirm this notion. So what, then, are 
the implications for faculty remaining 
in higher education longer than they 
want to or, in some cases, should? For 
the productive faculty members, there 
are absolutely no short- or long-term 
consequences as long as they genuinely 
Enjoy what they do. However, for the 
less productive faculty members who 
are now forced to remain working even 
after they had decided to "cash in their 
chips" and give up their seats at the 
faculty table, there are both short- and 
long-term costs.

Many older professors in the academy 
are tenured, with no mandatory 
retirement age. Some older, tenured 
faculty are seen by some younger 
professors as "clogging up the system" and 
preventing their own upward mobility 
inside the academy. While it is true in 
many other fields today that most folks 
are just happy to have a job, higher 
education is unique. Some of the 
newer, more recently hired faculty, who 
earn considerably less than their experienced 
colleagues do, possess the latest 
expertise and often greater enthusiasm, 
energy, and drive—so it is normal that 
they exhibit some frustration with the 
current state of affairs at most of 
today's traditional research institutions. 
The tasks of a "full" professor are not 
all that different from those of an 
"assistant" professor, yet they come 
with a higher salary and more job 
security.

If the phenomenon of faculty delaying 
their retirement plans continues, a 
number of questions will arise. Should 
universities offer incentives to retire—

Faculty are the lifeblood of 
any college or university. 
They should be involved in the decision-making 
process concerning their future workloads and any 
planned changes to their contracts and benefits.

pared to confront. Yet the fact remains 
that the academic job market for newly 
minted PhDs will only get more competitive unless colleges adopt a more 
proactive strategy for personnel planning.

Another area of concern for faculty 
who remain in their teaching positions 
is the issue of newly emerging instructional technologies. As a means of 
saving money, Web-based courses and 
degrees have generated a new interest 
in distance education, and their number is quickly increasing. Many universities have already moved to online 
teaching as a mechanism to reach more 
of today's students. With little professional development, it is no wonder 
some older faculty are entering the 
arena of online teaching "kicking and screaming" rather than voluntarily. The 
need for good, practical, hands-on fac-
ulty development in this particular 
teaching area will increase if colleges 
force faculty to take the courses that 
they have long taught in their assigned 
campus classrooms and facilitate these 
online. As with all faculty development 
programs, to be most effective, the 
people sitting in the audience should 
be there voluntarily, because they truly 
want to grow professionally, and 
should not be forced to attend.

A college or university is a complex 
entity consisting of numerous stakeholders, including administration, faculty, students, alumni, parents, and employers. Each of these stakeholders contributes to the university's culture, mission, and impact on important 
decisions. These are serious times that 
call for higher education administrators to make serious decisions to best meet the needs of their current student bodies and to plan for future entering 
classes. Faculty are the lifeblood of any 
college or university. They should be 
involved in the decision-making 
process concerning their future workloads and any planned changes to their 
contracts and benefits. However, for any higher educational institution that 
wishes to improve its academic quality while also remaining competitive in 
research, the rejuvenation of its faculty in the coming years will be extremely 
critical. The late George Keller knew 
this back in 1983, as he noted in his 
semeinal work Academic Strategy: The 
Management Revolution in American 
Higher Education. If only our colleges 
and universities had heeded his advice 
to think of themselves as business 
ofganizations and to plan for change 
strategically.

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Assessment Insights: An Interview with Trudy Banta


**A.L.:** Your book includes a wide variety of assessment examples—across different institutional types, units, and programs. What do these examples have in common?

**Banta:** I have a doctorate in educational psychology and have always been interested in applying knowledge in that field. I've found that one good application of my degree, which emphasized measurement, is in evaluating programs.

Whether you have an office of one person or an organization of ten thousand people, you have to start with some idea of where you want to go. You need to have some goals. Then you do some work, evaluate what you have done, and see if it met your goals. If it didn't, you might need to change something.

Ultimately, you may go back and change your goals. It becomes a cycle. The tools that one can use in conducting an evaluation can apply to anything—any subject, any office, any organization.

**A.L.:** In doing the research for your book, what surprised you? Are there things that you came across that you hadn't before?

**Banta:** One-hundred forty-six assessment examples were sent to us, and we used all of those in one way or another in the book. I think it's a pretty fair sample of what's going on in higher education assessment. Yet most of the programs that we looked at had only been underway for two, three, or four years. When we asked what the long-term impact of doing assessment and using the findings to improve programs had been, in only six percent of the cases were the authors able to say that student learning had been improved.

It's absolutely ideal if the evaluator is on the ground floor as the program is being designed so that the goals and objectives, or outcomes, can be stated explicitly at the beginning.

The rest said things about improving processes, such as better teaching methods, better advising approaches, better faculty development programs, or about putting more resources into a program. None of those things is the real outcome that we seek—the improvement of student learning.

**A.L.:** Is that a reflection of the limitations of the assessment process?

**Banta:** Yes. We don't have many measurement methods that will give us valid and reliable information about growth in college student learning over time.

In addition, most of the initiatives people wrote to us about had only been in place for two or three years and all the bugs had not been worked out.

Since the programs were still evolving, there just hadn't been time for follow up to see what difference they had made.

Another thing about this is that many people do not stay in assessment positions. The campus assessment leadership position often will be filled by a faculty member who is an excellent communicator and an energetic person whom people can depend on get things done. Then this person realizes that their profession is moving on, and they need to be part of it, so they leave the assessment role to go back to their faculty position. The program may end when the person goes back to the faculty, and if it's taken up by another person, they may do it a different way. It becomes a different project.

**A.L.:** The book mentions the role that assessment can play in program design. Do you have any findings or insights on what designing assessment and an academic program simultaneously might mean?

**Banta:** It's absolutely ideal if the evaluator is on the ground floor as the program is being designed so that the goals and objectives, or outcomes, can be stated explicitly at the beginning. Then the program can be designed to achieve the goals and the evaluation can take place on the basis of the stated goals.

It's becoming much more of a requirement these days that any new program has a set of specific student learning outcomes and a way of evaluating the program's success in achieving these outcomes. We now have guidelines at my institution that require new program proposals to contain both specific student learning outcomes and methods for assessing the
outcomes. These proposals are read very carefully by faculty committees and sent back for revision if means for assessing the stated outcomes are missing.

**AL:** What advice do you have for developing an assessment strategy for an existing program?

**Banta:** Probably the easiest place to start would be in a senior seminar or a capstone course. You can say at that point what you want students to know and be able to do as they graduate and begin assessing to see if they know and can do those things. If you find weaknesses at that senior level, then you may say to your colleagues, for example, “It looks like our students are not getting a grounding in values and ethics. Where in our curriculum could we give students earlier experiences with values and ethics so that by the time they are seniors they’ve had some practice and are able to recognize others’ values and state their own ethics or values?”

Another way is to start at the freshman level. In an introductory course, learning community, or freshman seminar you could say to students, “Here are some of the things we want you to know and be able to do. We’ll start now and by the time you’re seniors we hope you’ll be able to do these things really well.” So you can start at either end of the continuum, or any faculty member can start in their own course.

If I were the assessment lead, going in to help a faculty member at the course level, I would ask to see the syllabus, assignments, and exams and work with that person to discern what the implicit learning outcomes are. Then we would develop an explicit statement of the outcomes.

**AL:** What roles should academic leaders play in assessment? What does it mean to be a leader of assessment?

**Banta:** The first thing for an academic administrator to do is to make it plain that they value data and are not willing to accept anecdotes and opinions only as support for an idea. When faculty approach you with a proposal, ask them to show that there is a need for this, just as if it were a research problem.

When you are considering some new research, you want to review related literature and find where the approach you propose fits in the context of work underway or already completed. It could be that somebody has already done it, and it’s not so important to replicate it.

So as a leader, you ask, “What evidence should we collect to show that things will be better if we carry out your proposal? Will students learn more, or will they be more satisfied if we do this?” Always ask for data and help faculty see that assessment is important in the work they do. We always want to be checking, assessing, and evaluating to see if we’re accomplishing our goals. If our data say we are not accomplishing our goals, then what are we going to change?

It’s amazing that sometimes even just in planning to do assessment you discover things that make you want to change something.

Let’s say that we know that we want to develop students’ values and ethics, so we ask everyone in the department to indicate whether they teach values and ethics. Is it a strong component of what they teach, do they teach it at all, or is it somewhere in the middle? Lo and behold, we find that although we say values and ethics are important, there’s only one course where they are even touched on.

Right away faculty can say, “We need to correct that. We either need a new course, or we need three courses that are going to emphasize values and ethics. We definitely need to do more.” This is something that you can say needs to be changed without ever gathering any data from students.

Trudy Banta is a professor of higher education and senior advisor to the chancellor for academic planning and evaluation at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis.

On September 23, Dr. Banta will lead an online seminar titled "Principles and Profiles of Good Practice in Assessment." For information, see www.magnapubs.com/calendar/358.html.

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**Online Seminar Call for Proposals**

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structively than using the means they discovered on their own.

**Leading by example**

In other words, a calm face-to-face discussion teaches a useful alternative to the type of email war that no one ever seems to win. Attempting to silence an email war with an angry

**Attempting to silence an email war with an angry reply inadvertently reinforces the very behavior that is causing the problem.**

reply inadvertently reinforces the very behavior that is causing the problem. It demonstrates that harsh words are effective, as long as they come from a person with sufficient authority. At best, the current exchange will cease temporarily, only to emerge at a later date with even greater rancor. At worst, the person who sought to end the conflict will become merely another participant in it, thus causing any hope of providing a reasonable and lasting end to the battle to be lost.

On the other hand, by working through the issue face-to-face, those involved may come to realize that there is a useful alternative to harsh email exchanges. In all probability, one constructive conversation won’t eliminate belligerent emails immediately. Nevertheless, it will provide a foundation for long-term improvement in internal communication. For this reason, it’s a good practice to end the discussion with an invitation to sit down again if a similar dispute should ever arise in the future. By making this offer, you’ll have a positive way to respond immediately in the event of another email war, reminding the participants of your standing invitation and insisting that there are better ways to air differences than using the school’s information resources.

**Appropriate use policies**

Finally, most institutions have appropriate use policies for computer resources, and such a document at your school may already have a clause that will lend you support in quelling an email war. If your school’s policy does not contain language that applies to collegiality in all communications, now may be a good time to request that such a provision be added in the future.

While you never want an appropriate use policy to restrict free speech on campus, a well-constructed set of guidelines can actually promote more open communication. After all, certain members of the faculty or staff are less likely to express an opinion on a topic if they see others being personally attacked for stating their own views.

The standards of collegiality and professionalism require all members of the academy to conduct themselves in a manner that does not discourage others from advancing their views and having their perspectives seriously considered. Ad hominem attacks, abusive language, and public humiliation go far beyond an individual’s right to “speak one’s mind” and ultimately stifle open debate.

Including guidelines on the tone of communication in an institutional policy on acceptable use of electronic resources can go a long way toward providing academic leaders with the grounds they need to intervene with members of the faculty and staff who repeatedly engage in email wars. A good example of a well-designed appropriate use policy can be found at the Southern Illinois University School of Medicine, where the Responsible Use Guidelines state:

Electronic mail and other forms of communication should be used in [a] responsible and courteous manner. Use of electronic mail, other communications services, or other network communications facilities to harass, offend, or annoy other users of the network is forbidden. All users need to be aware that material which is obscene, defamatory, or violates University guideline[s] on non-discrimination will not be tolerated. The University reserves all rights to take appropriate measures to prevent, correct, or discipline behavior that violates this guideline. ([www.si.um.edu/irpolicy/Acceptable_Use.pdf; retrieved May 14, 2009](www.si.um.edu/irpolicy/Acceptable_Use.pdf);

While this policy does tie acts of uncollegial communication to the university’s non-discrimination policy, its emphasis on “responsible and courteous” electronic exchanges gives administrators a basis for addressing email wars as well as other types of unprofessional inflammatory exchanges.

Behavior-Based Interviewing Strategies for Hiring New Faculty

By Mary C. Clement, EdD

The stakes are high when hiring a new faculty member who can teach, publish, and serve your institution. Since most vitae make the candidates sound wonderful, is there a way to ensure that the strongest candidates get hired? Long used in the business world, behavior-based interviewing (BBI) aids in the selection of new faculty who can perform their tasks.

Based on the premise that past behavior is the best predictor of future performance, behavior-based interviewing calls upon candidates to tell about their previous skills, knowledge, and experiences. Savvy interviewers on the search committee ask BBI-style questions that start with “Tell me about a time when...” or “Describe how you have...”

Envision the new position

To make a behavior-based interview work, everyone involved on the search committee must be able to envision the position and must know what skills, knowledge, and experiences a successful candidate possesses. Then, questions addressing those skills should be written. Committee members should take notes and evaluate the candidates’ answers with a premade rubric. While much interviewing in higher education is unstructured, e.g., by having a group of students meet with candidates or by having meals with candidates, every effort should be made to have the same structure for the overall interview schedule, and to have an identical list of questions posed to candidates at a given time.

Writing and evaluating answers

Questions about teaching, publishing, and service are determined in advance by the search committee. Examples include:
1. Describe how you teach a lesson. What do your plans include?
2. Tell us about a lesson that went well and why it went well.
3. Your teaching here will be (undergraduate, graduate, etc.). How do you motivate students at this level to excel academically?
4. Tell us about your research and publishing agenda. What has guided your success in getting work completed and submitted?
5. How have you involved students in your research?
6. Where have you shared your research in the past (conferences, etc.)?
7. What are ways that you have served your institution in the past?
8. Tell us about any committee work you have done.

Of course, the ultimate behavior-based interview strategy is to observe the candidate teaching. Instruments for rating candidates’ answers in the structured interviews and their sample lessons should be written in advance.

Evaluating answers

The simplest rating instrument is one with three categories—unacceptable, acceptable, and target. Other evaluators prefer a numeric scale of 1 to 5 or 1 to 7. For the search committee, list all questions and then put the rating system at the side. It is then easy to see how many target answers are given or how many high scores are attained. “PAR” and “STAR” may help you evaluate answers. PAR stands for problem, action, and result. If a candidate is asked about a concern or problem in teaching, then he or she should be able to talk about that problem, an action taken, and a result learned. Likewise, STAR represents situation, task, action, and result. When asked any question, a candidate who can describe his or her experience with the situation or task presented and then describe an action and a result reveals knowledge and experience. How a candidate approached the topic in the past is how he or she will approach the topic when hired, according to BBI.

When creating a quick evaluation tool for students and observers of a candidate’s lesson, consider unacceptable, acceptable, and target, or a sliding scale of 1 to 5. One is “no” and 5 is “definitely.” The categories might include the following: instructor introduced the lesson well, instructor organized the material efficiently in the body of the lesson, instructor was clear in explanations, instructor seemed enthusiastic, etc.

Key reminders:
1. The behavior-based approach helps in sorting large numbers of applicants. Make an evaluation rubric for each set of credentials received, looking specifically at a candidate’s match with the job description, experience teaching at this level, etc.
2. Keeping a list of illegal questions in front of faculty and students in open interviews will help prevent someone from asking about family, race, religion, etc.
3. Some candidates may be able to talk about teaching but still not be able to actually teach. However, a candidate who cannot describe any aspect of a lesson doesn’t know how to teach a lesson, either.

Using the behavior-based style of interviewing can help search committees have a basis for structuring interviews.

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Aphorisms for Academic Affairs

J.A. Sheppard, PhD

Over the past few years, I have realized that most of the preparation for academic leadership is focused on how to effect institutional change and make a positive difference. These certainly are the “big ticket” items. The truth is, however, that such broad topics don’t really hit on the blocking and tackling of daily management. With that in mind, here is a little collective wisdom that may prove especially useful for those who are beginning their journey in academic affairs.

Sometimes the president will yell at you. It may be for something that is beyond your control, an oddity from another unit of the college, a decision in the faculty senate, a particularly troublesome employee, a disruptive trustee, or an eviction from the community. It’s OK. Let the president yell at you.

Never suppose that your plans should be implemented exactly as you envision. You are not a portrait artist. People who lead academic affairs are impressionists.

English professors don’t do math.

Pay attention to the signals in voice mail greetings. Burnouts and post-due emeriti have their assistants record their greetings. Self-esteem builders create title-laden salutations that are longer than your message. Power brokers don’t answer the phone. These are the people who serve on your committees.

Business faculty “reduce ramp-up time by knocking off a corner in order to pick the low-hanging fruit”—nobody really knows what that means.

Pay attention to the directors. The good ones regulate mischief and their contributions are seldom small. The bad directors are usually inflexible and prefer policy to people. Don’t let the bad ones shoot the citizens in order to save the state.

The acronyms in teacher education are not a foreign language.

Whatever you think you are cleaning up made sense to somebody in the past. We are merely stewards passing through the institution. Keep in mind that somebody will have to correct your brilliance in the future.

Never assume that you’ve seen it all. People are like snowflakes: no two are alike, when conditions are right they stick together, and they make a mess when they melt.

Avoid cleverly disguised professional conferences that are beauty pageants for presidential wannabes.

Most important: keep your sense of humor.

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