MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

University Senate

Report on Evaluations of Senior Administrators by Faculty, Staff, and Librarians
May 19th, 2021 - Submitted to the University Senate by the Task Force for the Study of
Administrative Evaluations

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Task Force for the study of Senior Level Administrators (SLA) Evaluations, in reviewing significant literature and other institutions' practices, found that most benchmark, and other comparable institutions have a systematic process whereby faculty, librarians and staff evaluate the job performance of SLA. The Task Force established key findings that clarify what the purpose of SLA job performance evaluations is, why the University Senate should implement SLA evaluations, and what the processes are to implement them. Findings include the importance of the evaluation of SLAs by constituents within the scope of shared governance, and the literature reveals that the data gathered through the process of SLA evaluations is salient and valuable to the institution's overall effectiveness.

The Task Force proposes several recommendations for the University Senate to consider as they work toward establishing a system whereby faculty, librarians, and staff will evaluate the job performance of SLAs at Montclair State University. The recommendations include focusing the questions in the evaluation on the institution's goals and strategic plan, and addressing issues of confidentiality and transparency. A full list of findings and recommendations follows the literature review.

PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

This document contains the Task Force findings and proposed recommendations (accompanied by supporting documentation) for implementing performance evaluation procedures for SLAs at Montclair State University. Currently (as of April 2021) at Montclair State University the formal administrative evaluation process for an SLA such as Provost, Vice President, Dean, director or manager consists of an annual self appraisal and downward review process. Administrators are asked to self assess their progress. The tool used for assessments consists of three broad questions (see Appendix A). Collaboration or consultation with their supervisor may or may not occur depending on many factors, and is not specifically regulated. The President's evaluation is conducted by the Board of Trustees, and lacks the level of transparency provided by other public institutions of higher education.

PROCEDURE

In December 2020 the University Senate of Montclair State University constituted a Task Force to investigate the value and utility of, as well as practices and procedures for, performance evaluation of

senior administrators by shared-governance bodies of higher-education and research institutions. Senate Chairperson of Administrative Affairs Council, Shannon Bellum (Family Science and Human Development), served as the Task Force convenor and chairperson. Committee members included Jaime Grinberg (Educational Foundations), Vanessa E. Greenwood (School of Communication and Media), and Miriam Linver (Family Science and Human Development).

The Task Force gathered literature and a multitude of comparable institutions' self-published guidelines and processes on the subject of formal administrator evaluations by faculty, staff, and students (see Appendix B & C). The Chair of the Task Force, Shannon Bellum, met with senior administrators to gather current evaluation practices. In addition, the Task Force convened via Zoom four (4) times during the Spring 2021 semester (January through May) to discuss the literature, cull findings, and formulate recommendations.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Senior level administrators' job performance is regularly evaluated by their institution, including shared governance bodies at numerous colleges and universities across the United States (see Appendix B). Processes and procedures for formal SLA evaluations are developed and implemented either entirely by shared governance bodies, such as the University Senate, or in collaboration with the institution as part of the SLA's overall performance and effectiveness at the institution level. Faculty, librarians, and staff are in a unique position to inform SLA evaluations on leadership as a whole. More specifically, they may evaluate SLA interactions, and their support of faculty, librarians, and staff, student life as it relates to academic processes and methods of research and instruction. After all, faculty, librarians, and staff often have served their institution much longer than SLAs, many of whom change positions frequently (AAUP, 2006). Their expertise is both valuable and salient in a full and fair evaluation process. As members of shared governance, faculty, librarians, and staff are already accustomed to delivering timely and informed communications, reports, and recommendations to the senior administration. The inclusion of their voices in the performance evaluation process for senior administrators is long overdue at Montclair State University.

The Task Force's review of the literature concluded that the primary purpose of constituents' evaluation of SLAs is to improve the job performance of the individual, and therefore, the overall operation and effectiveness of the academic institution (see Appendix B). Evaluation of individuals and institutions is inevitable and will occur regularly, whether informally or formally. Further, the effectiveness of a Dean, Provost, Vice President, and President is to a great extent determined by the degree to which each individual involves the wider university community in their decision making—that is, the extent to which they embrace shared governance. An important aspect of administrative leadership is the candid exchange of views between administrators and their constituents. Research on effective leadership among presidents in higher education confirms that communication is one of the key nine tenets of an effective college president's leadership (Wolverton et al., 2006). Although such discussions should occur continuously, formalized reviews at regular intervals offer the opportunity for constituents to evaluate SLAs' accomplishments and to renew commitments toward the same institutional goals. Le and Lei's (2019) research supports the principle that sharing knowledge is a crucial component of transformative

leadership that successfully sustains organizational support. In sum, broad institutional acceptance of constituents' evaluations of SLAs is one way the institution's leadership can commit to its support of shared governance principles. Formal constituent evaluations planned at regular intervals help identify areas in need of improvement and help stakeholders appreciate and properly understand administrative challenges and perspectives. Feedback from the constituents define ways to develop and enhance professional, and therefore, institutional, effectiveness. Finally, it is critical to keep in mind that the primary goal of the evaluation process is to improve the institution's growth, and measure its effectiveness in achieving its larger goals. The primary goal should not focus on promoting the growth of powerful individuals.

Literature on the evaluation of SLAs demonstrates that multi source evaluations are most effective in the professional development of administrators and managers. Multi source feedback, also known as "360 degree feedback," includes soliciting performance ratings from subordinates, peers, and supervisors, as well as participating in self ratings (Morris & Laipple, 2018). All senior level managers and administrators, from the President down should be subject to evaluation, and all persons who are knowledgeable about their performance, all those with whom this individual interacts, and whom this individual impacts, should be involved in the evaluation.

Perhaps most important for Montclair State University constituents, "formal evaluation makes clear that senior administrators are accountable for their decisions" (Southeastern Louisiana University, 1997; McKerrow & Dennis, 1989). Constituent evaluations, specifically, have been shown to contribute to managers' improvement, including better communication, more effective work relationships, and improved respect for employees' opinions (McCarthy & Garavan, 2001). A well designed, formal constituent evaluation tool would provide consistent feedback from faculty, librarians, and staff in order to inform SLAs how they're performing against specific institutional goals and benchmarks. Drew (2009) found that when it came time for administrators to set their own development goals, subordinates ratings were the most influential factor. McCarthy & Garavan (2001) note constituents evaluation is a particularly useful tool in leadership development programs because of the richness of the feedback that is provided by subordinates. A question that asks a subordinate to assess an abstract trait of a supervisor (e.g., "What is your supervisor's level of creativity?") will likely yield fewer meaningful responses than specific, behavior-related questions (e.g., respondents can be asked to indicate their level of agreement with a statement: "My supervisors provides clear instructions for assigned tasks: never/sometimes/always") (Coggburn, 1997).

The literature emphasizes "future-oriented" assessment that is more focused on how past performance can yield future success, especially for high level SLAs, such as the President. In other words, the evaluation is both summative and formative (Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, 2012). The emphasis on formative evaluation is both salient and crucial in a post-pandemic world where the academic environment is continually changing.

Institutional and individual organizational unit goals and objectives are the yardstick against which SLA effectiveness should be measured - as they are for many other components of the institution and organizational chart (Appendix D). Leadership should be based on proven results, and formal evaluation,

when appropriately conducted, increases understanding and appreciation for the administrator's tasks and credibility for the outcomes (Southeastern Louisiana University, 1997). Their power, charisma, or leadership style is of much lesser significance, although an administrator's leadership style should be part of the evaluation. Assessing an SLA affirms and gauges their importance to an institution. The underlying value of any personnel evaluation is to improve the effectiveness of the institution itself and not to increase the power of any one constituency or individual (McKerrow & Dennis, 1989). If a university president, for example, rejects participatory democracy in the form of shared governance implied by formal constituent evaluation, that is not leadership; it is merely defense of power. When evaluations and their processes are formalized and descriptive, they can encompass the complexity of the SLA's role and therefore increase constituents' appreciation for the difficulties of the role. It is also advantageous to evaluate the president's impact on institutional goals to protect them from spurious, or partisan evaluations. Conversely, if an upper level administrator rejects constituents' evaluation, personnel actions may become both trivialize and weaponize, thus perpetuating a schism between SLAs and other employees, including faculty, librarians, and staff. An institution is more than its strategic plan, policies, and purposes; it is a dynamic entity dependent upon the activity of faculty, students, staff, alumni, and the public (McKerrow & Dennis, 1989). Therefore, those most affected by the actions of SLAs should be the most involved in their evaluation.

Without a formal constituent evaluation system in place for SLAs at Montclair State University, the president, in particular, does not have accountability to any person or group in the community save the Board of Trustees. It is surprising that, in recent institutional memory, the Board of Trustees has not requested, nor implemented, constituent evaluation of the university's top executive position. It is a thoroughly informed understanding of the President's role and related performance that allows for intelligent and fair minded decision-making on the Board's part (McKerrow & Dennis, 1989). Otherwise, the Board relies solely on information the President cares to share. A board's effectiveness comes from having unbiased, accurate knowledge of the issues and challenges facing the university, including leadership's performance. McKerrow & Dennis (1989) continue, "no evaluation by a responsible board could be considered valid that does not at least include evaluation by the faculty and staff who carry out policies and plans, and who work to reach the stated goals."

There is evidence to suggest that institutional support of various kinds plays a significant role in the likelihood of SLA processes leading to continuous improvement (Drew, 2009). Ideally, this includes the collaboration of constituents and SLAs in the development of questions, and how the outcomes are utilized by the SLA being reviewed and the institution itself. The most effective system of SLA evaluations are those that occur as part of a collaborative endeavor involving faculty, staff, and other campus constituents with a stake in the outcome, and the individual under review (AAUP, 2006). What is essential for successful integration of the material collected from constituent evaluations is a degree of trust and fairness on both sides. Evaluation of administrators by constituents works best when all parties involved consider it an attempt to improve the health and strength of the institution rather than targeting individuals (SUNY Faculty University Senate, 2005). Ideally, upon viewing their evaluation, the senior administrator will acknowledge the evaluation, give a response formally and/or informally to their constituents, and initiate more conversations that prompt an exchange of ideas and feedback. According to Spendlove (2007), people skills, including the ability to communicate and negotiate with others, are

important for SLAs. It is equally important that the results of the evaluations be viewed as legitimate and effective by constituents. To that end, it is vital that those implementing evaluation processes and procedures maintain a level of transparency, and report regularly through the University Senate.

An important consideration going forward with constituent evaluation will be where the evaluation data is digitally stored and by whom it can be viewed. A false assumption exists that making evaluations of SLAs public means that the evaluations will be negative, or that negative results in the purpose of making them public (Coggburn, 1998; McKerrow & Dennis, 1989). Neither is the case. The act of maintaining confidentiality itself privileges the interest of the SLA over the interests of the university. The implementation of evaluations should be conducted in the best interests of the university, and not in the interests of an individual SLA.

Some institutions have made all findings viewable to the public (University of Michigan, 2020), while others have kept some information behind a firewall, presumably viewable only by employees. Tangentially, if the evaluations given by constituents are to be anonymous, organizations collecting and processing the data must show how anonymity is respected and protected. Finally, results should be shared in ways that maintain confidentiality but also reach all constituents in a timely manner, so as to not undermine the meaningfulness of the participation of constituents.

The Task Force's review of the practices from other institutions, and the literature, reveal that decisions about who reviews whom are very complex, and do not follow a single linear path (see Appendix B). Some institutions have constituents and students review SLAs' job performance, while others are more limited and selective. What the literature makes clear is constituents should evaluate any functionary in an SLA position who directly impacts the quality of their work, for example, the Provost and some administrators in similar offices. Further, a department chair should also evaluate the Registrar, Human Resources, and Finances. Staff should evaluate their Dean's office senior managers, Human Resources, Finances, Facilities, and any other manager responsible for the operation of their units. In some SLA reviews, it may be important to interpret 'evaluation' as providing information to assist SLAs in understanding the impact of their decisions on academic, and other units, e.g. how fiscal decisions create academic consequences. The Task Force has determined that the scope of the questions planned for development by the next University Senate committee would inform who evaluates whom.

Other institutions' practices in frequency of evaluations was not singularly defined, nor is sufficient rationale provided for a particular frequency (see Appendix B & C). McKerrow and Dennis (1989) recommend evaluation practices for presidents be in place before they begin their term, and certainly completed near the end of their first year.

KEY FINDINGS

1. *Meaningful evaluation of Senior Level Administrators is contingent upon, and contributes to, efficacious institutional **shared governance.***
2. *A systematic evaluation process for senior administrators **is essential to** (and not merely congruent with) fulfilling the institutional mission of Montclair State University.*
3. *Performance expectations in facilitating institutional goals are operationally defined through an existing strategic plan, among other pertinent documents developed through shared governance.*
4. *Effective SLA performance evaluation is intentionally **formative and not merely summative;** that is, designed to improve and develop SLAs and their institutional effectiveness, not pass judgement on past performance.*
5. *Evaluation provides an orderly and structured process for gathering objective evidence about performance and provides accountability.*
6. *Summative evaluation of the President by constituents reinforces the institutional system of checks and balances; therefore,*
7. *Summative evaluation of the President completed by constituents should be shared by the University Senate with the Board of Trustees, prior to their assessment of the President.*
8. *Summative evaluation of other SLA by constituents should be shared by the University Senate with their direct supervisors, prior to their assessment of each SLA.*
9. *Systematic procedures and instruments already exist that can be adapted to our own institutional structure and circumstances.*
10. *Institutional support for development, implementation, and distribution of SLA evaluations increases the efficacy of evaluations.*

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The University Senate can serve as the hub for ensuring timely and systematic procedures for evaluating SLAs. A specific standing committee should be named, and members appointed, following the University Senate's democratic practices.
2. Evaluation processes and procedures must collectively communicate the intent of furthering institutional goals and effectiveness rather than isolating or critiquing the individual performance of an SLA.
3. SLA job descriptions may be a useful starting point in developing questions for the constituent evaluation process. The evaluation tool may also refer to the institutional mission, strategic plan, and other documentation developed in the spirit of shared governance.
4. The development of questions should include queries that dismantle the hierarchical status of leadership on the campus. For example, when an SLA is being considered for a faculty line, the evaluation should include questions about an SLA's scholarship with peer evaluations, and how said scholarship contributes to their leadership ability.

5. The evaluation process should require the SLA to engage in self-reflection about, but not limited to, the nature of their current position and their individual strengths and weaknesses. The result should yield both short-term and long-term goals.
6. Careful attention must be paid to balancing the transparency needed to ensure administrative accountability with the privacy requisite to professional growth and development.
7. Results should be shared in ways that maintain evaluators' anonymity yet also reaches all constituents.
8. The policies and procedures for evaluating SLAs at Southern Louisiana University (see Appendix B) can be adapted to suit the specific needs at Montclair State University.
9. The results of the evaluation should be respectful of the individual being evaluated. At the same time, the SLA evaluation should be very specific in its recommendations and also include a suggested strategy for the implementation of those recommendations.
10. Hiring an external consultant may prove efficacious when evaluating specifically the university president—a position that resides between the university community as a whole and the entity of the Board of Trustees. However, all evaluations including the president's should be primarily conducted by stakeholders; external evaluators can provide useful context, perspective, and expertise, but are not themselves evaluators.
11. The University Senate may consult with the Office of Institutional Research (OIR) and Office of Institutional Technology (OIT) on issues relative to public access to SLA evaluations.
12. SLA evaluations can be done annually, however, frequency depends on many factors, and is an aspect the University Senate should weigh carefully and determine based on the scope of the evaluation process.
13. Evaluations to be developed may be prioritized for any new SLA, e.g. President, or interim SLA, especially if the interim will be applying for an open position.

Appendices

Appendix A: Administrative & Managerial Evaluation (link)

https://www.montclair.edu/human-resources/learning-and-development/performance-evaluation-managers

Appendix B: Supporting Bibliography

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Appendix C: Institutions reviewed

Ball State University

Florida International University

George Mason University

Georgia State University

Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis

Miami University (Ohio)

Michigan State University

Northern Arizona University

San Diego State University

Southeastern Louisiana University

University at Buffalo – SUNY

University of Central Florida

University of Massachusetts Boston

University of North Carolina Greensboro

University of Rhode Island

Utah Valley University

Appendix D: Organizational Chart (link)
Office of President
https://www.montclair.edu/organizational-charts/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2020/09/office-president-sep-2020-org-chart.pdf

College and School Organizational Charts available from Human Resources

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