

Using Personal Statements in Faculty Evaluations¹

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This paper is intended to help faculty review committees, department chairs, and university administrators make effective use of personal statements that faculty members include in annual evaluations, third-year reviews, and promotion and tenure reviews. Personal statements can benefit the faculty who create the statements as well as faculty and administrators who use these statements as one source of data for making judgments about faculty performance. Those faculty members who understand the factors that contribute to successful teaching, research and original creative work,⁴ and service are more likely to perform at a level that merits continuation after the third year of their appointment as well as meriting promotion and tenure.

Faculty members vary in their understanding of the factors associated with success at a research-extensive university. Variations among faculty members include the following:

- Many beginning faculty members received good mentoring as graduate students and were keen observers of faculty performance at the institution where they received their degree. However, these faculty members still routinely ask, “What does it take to get promoted and tenured here at Florida State University?”
- Senior faculty members often ask a similar question to help them compare and contrast the expectations at this university with their experience at another institution.
- Some beginning faculty members did not receive good mentoring in their graduate study and are less aware of how to succeed in teaching, research and original creative work, and service.
- Some beginning faculty members also do not seek available opportunities for mentoring from senior faculty after being hired and as a result they may be even less cognizant of how to succeed.

Preparing for third-year reviews and promotion and tenure reviews provide faculty members with the opportunity for self-evaluation of their work in relation to factors that contribute to successful teaching, research and original creative work, and service. Making faculty members aware of the content that will be included in their personal statements can help them plan their work in a way that maximizes their chances for success.

¹ This paper is intended to be used along with *Successful Faculty Performance in Teaching, Research and Original Creative Work, and Service* and *Writing personal statements for faculty evaluations*. (Citations for these documents are available in the reference section of this paper.)

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⁴ The meaning of some of the terminology used in this paper has been clarified in the additional information section of this paper. These terms include: research, original creative work, program of research, and focus of original creative work.

Faculty members serving on promotion and tenure committees and administrators who are reviewing third-year and promotion and tenure binders can use personal statements as one source of data for evaluating faculty performance. As a source of evaluative data, personal statements can:

- Provide a context for understanding faculty intentions for the work that led to the performance documented in their third-year review binders and their promotion and tenure binders.
- Provide evidence of the extent to which faculty members understand the factors that can influence their future success.
- Provide evidence of the capability of faculty members to accurately evaluate their own performance in relation to the performance expectations at a doctoral research-extensive university.
- Highlight problems that may negatively impact future faculty performance, such as the inability to articulate a coherent program of research or focus of original creative work, as well as incongruence between faculty members' intentions and the evidence presented in the binder.

The goal of this paper is to improve the design and use of the personal statements in third-year reviews and promotion and tenure reviews. It begins with an examination of the problems that exist with current personal statements and continues with a discussion of the potential benefits of using standardized personal statements in evaluating faculty performance; a discussion of how standardized personal statements can be used; and a description of the proposed content, organization, and format of the statement.

Problems with Current Personal Statements

Many faculty members' personal statements do not make meaningful contributions to third-year and promotion and tenure reviews. Problems exist with the content included in statements and the variability among statements. Content problems with personal statements involve the following:

- Description of a series of research or original creative work projects as opposed to identifying a faculty member's program of research or focus of original creative work and then explaining how these projects have advanced the work of the faculty member.
- Failure to provide information that is relevant to the work of the faculty member, such as mentoring and advising students, even when it is obvious that the faculty member is supervising doctoral students.
- Explanation of some aspects of work in great detail while describing other aspects inadequately.
- Presentation of teaching, research and original creative work, and service as unrelated work tasks instead of explaining how one task enhances another task.

Problems with variability in personal statements include:

- Inconsistency in the organization and formatting of personal statements that makes it difficult and time consuming for other faculty and administrators to find specific information needed to make judgments about performance.

Potential Benefits from Using Standardizing Personal Statements

To be an effective source of data for evaluation, personal statements need to reflect the unique aspects of the work of a faculty member while also including the common aspects of teaching, research and original creative work, and service that are generally shared by faculty members in a doctoral research university. Using a common framework for the content in the personal statement helps to ensure that important elements of performance shared by faculty members are included in an evaluation. Using a common framework for the organization and format of personal statements will also make it easier for faculty serving on review committees and administrators to find and use the information they need to make evaluative judgments.

Using Standardized Personal Statements in Evaluating Faculty Performance

A standardized personal statement for third-year reviews and promotion and tenure reviews could be used in several ways, including:

- Evaluating the extent to which faculty members clearly communicate an understanding of how factors contributing to successful performance have been, and will be, applied to their work. Such factors could include:
 - Conceptualizing a coherent program of research or focus of original creative work that is likely to lead to further productive and sustainable scholarship.
 - Collaborating with students in conducting research or original creative work in a way that promotes student learning as well as contributing to a faculty member's own work.
- Evaluating whether or not faculty members' statements about their work are congruent with the evidence of their performance presented in their Curriculum Vitae and letters from external reviewers.
- In writing review letters, department chairs and deans can refer to content in the personal statements to provide support for specific evaluative judgments. For example, a review letter could quote a sentence from the personal statement that identifies a faculty member's program of research and then comment on evidence presented in the Vita that shows the systematic development of the research. A quote from an external reviewer who has reached a similar judgment could also be added to provide further evidence of a faculty member's carefully designed line of research.

Additional Information

Course Development

Course development refers to creating a new course or making substantive revisions, such as developing a distance learning component or Web-based learning resources.

Curriculum Development

Curriculum development includes designing new courses, distance learning programs, certificate programs, majors, and degree programs. Curriculum development does not include the normal ongoing development of an existing course.

Management of Multiple Course Sections

Management of multiple course sections involves coordinating the ongoing design, development, and delivery of instruction for a course having several sections that are taught by various faculty members, graduate students, or adjunct faculty. Responsibilities typically include leadership in development and/or selection of course materials, revision of course content based on evaluations, selection of instructors, and arrangement of instructional technology for the course. When the course is taught by graduate students or adjunct faculty members, regular supervision and evaluation of instructors may be involved.

Research and Original Creative Work

Research includes various scholarly efforts designed to examine questions of scientific, social, literary, or artistic importance by obtaining, analyzing, and interpreting data that can guide future research and in some cases lead to application of the findings and the refinement of public policy. Research contributions are most often made through publications and conference presentations. **Original creative work** includes various imaginative and innovative contributions that can have artistic, social, and economic value. Examples of original and creative work include novels and novellas, short stories, poems, scripts, screenplays, musical compositions, musical arrangements, choreography, performances, production and design for performances, visual art, interior design, apparel design, edited works, Internet Web site development, computer software development, and inventions.

Program of Research or Focus of Original Creative Work

A **program of research** involves a systematic investigation of related elements of a topic over a period of time. A **focus of original creative work** involves the exploration of related artistic themes or mediums of expression over a period of time. Having one or two clear and consistent programs of research or foci of original creative work makes it more likely that faculty members will achieve their goals and make substantive contributions to their field. The synergy inherent to programmatic research helps faculty members gain insights and specialized expertise that would not be possible if their research were conducted on a variety of unrelated topics. Programmatic research builds on the prior research of faculty members, as well as students and other researchers. Programmatic research also provides greater visibility for a faculty member as other researchers note the consistent contributions of the faculty member in publications and conference presentations. Similar advantages exist for having a thematic focus for original creative work. However, a program of research or focus of original creative work should not be restrictive. Serendipity resulting from new funding options, technology, or other developments may provide new opportunities that should not be ignored.

A faculty member typically has only one or two programs of research that typically evolve or change over time. The same is true for original creative work. The two can be distinct or related in various ways. A program of research statement or focus of creative work statement can reflect current work, past work, or both. A statement is typically no longer than one or two

sentences. The following example shows a faculty member having a single program of research: “Examine the influence of extracognitive factors (beliefs, emotions, culture) in shaping the teaching and learning of science.” In this second example, the faculty member has two programs of research: “Examine the content and process of career decision making using a cognitive information processing approach, and then apply the knowledge gained to designing and delivering cost-effective career resources and services. Also, examine the design and appropriate use of information and communication technology in the delivery of assessment and information resources as well as counseling and guidance services.” An example of a focus of original creative work statement is as follows: “Explore the interaction among light, composition, and subject matter in expressing mood in still life photographs.”

References

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