



From: Michael Veall, Chair, Provost's Task Force on Evaluation, Accountability and Measurement

Date: April 4, 2008

RE: Consultation on Assessment Methods: Academic Departments

Dear Chair or Director,

I am sending you this survey on behalf of the Provost's Task Force on Evaluation, Accountability and Measurement. This committee has been set up in part to develop a process for assessing departments and units in the context of McMaster's long-term strategic plan, Refining Directions. This process is intended to provide information that can help set priorities and align resources with the goals of Refining Directions.

We are very conscious that you get many requests and we worry about "consultation fatigue". However, whether we all like it or not, judgments are made about academic departments (and nonacademic units, which we are addressing separately) at various levels in the University. It is our view that departments should have a say in the methods and criteria that underlie those judgments. We hope very much, therefore, that you will participate and, ideally, involve your department in constructing your response. Replies would be most useful to us if they are received by May 7.

Our terms of reference and membership are available at:

http://www.mcmaster.ca/vpacademic/currentpriorities/Eval_%20Account_Meas.html

Further information regarding Refining Directions can be found at:

<http://www.mcmaster.ca/pres/refining/report.cfm>

We understand that not all questions will be relevant to all departments.

Our report, based in part upon these responses, is due in June. It will be available for further comment. Unless so requested, responses will not be anonymous in that they may be attributed in the report. While we have done our best to anticipate concerns (a total of seven chairs were involved or consulted in the preparation of the survey), questions are welcome at tfam@mcmaster.ca. Please return all completed questionnaires to tfam@mcmaster.ca or by campus mail to Mike Veall c/o Department of Economics, KTH 426.

Questionnaire on Assessment Methods: Academic Departments

External Reviews

An academic department (or area or school) may be subject to a University Review of Academic Departments which is internal to McMaster (even if it may use external reviewers), an Ontario Council on Graduate Studies (OCGS) appraisal of its graduate programs and more recently an Ontario Council of Academic Vice-Presidents undergraduate program review (UPR). Links to descriptions of these reviews are given at the end of this survey.

1. (i) Does your department find each of these reviews useful? Are they jointly sufficient for evaluating the contributions of your department? Does your department have suggestions as to how McMaster could change its approach to these reviews to make them more useful?

(In considering your responses, you may wish to consider some criticisms of these reviews. Criticisms we have heard include: the reviews are too burdensome, they are not transparent and kept secret, they are too infrequent for planning purposes and that external reviewers may become advocates rather than unbiased judges, and this limits the influence of the reviews with senior administration.)

- (ii) Is your department subject to any other external reviews (e.g., for purposes of accreditation)? If so, please describe.

Undergraduate Instruction and Programs

Every academic department at McMaster has resource limitations, perhaps of particular importance for undergraduate instruction. However, departments still may assess the quality of education they provide, given the resources they have, and may be asked to report on their undergraduate program quality outside the department.

2. What information does your department use to assess internally the quality of its undergraduate instruction and programs? If different, what information would it prefer to use for internal assessment and external reporting? (Information that is or could be used might include internal or external reviews, student evaluations of teaching effectiveness, student exit surveys, student retention rates, internal or external awards to students or instructors, information on post-graduation outcomes, measures of contributions to other programs, number of students registered in your programs, total course enrolments and performance of students on external examinations. Feel free to include other possibilities and to criticize indicators that your department feels have been or may be used inappropriately. Please try to give a sense of the relative importance of different kinds of information.)

Graduate Instruction and Programs

3. How would your answer to question 2 differ for your department's graduate instruction and graduate programs, if at all? (Besides the information listed for question 2, other possibilities for graduate programs might include numbers of applicants, indicators of the quality of graduate students attracted, times to degree completion and research accomplishments of graduate students.)

Research

4. What information does your department use to assess internally its research performance? If different, what information would it prefer to use for internal assessment and external reporting? (Such information might include external or internal reviews, published national or international departmental rankings, measures of research output such as number of publications perhaps adjusted by citations or measures of journal quality, patents, research grant measures and internal or external research awards. Feel free to suggest other possibilities or to criticize indicators that your department feels have been or may be used inappropriately. Please try to give some sense of the relative importance of different kinds of information.)

Building an Inclusive Community

Along with teaching/learning and research goals, a goal of Refining Directions is "to build an inclusive community with a shared purpose". The associated target is "to ensure that all members of the McMaster community feel recognized and valued for their contributions to this shared purpose."

5. How would your department prefer its contribution to this goal and associated target be assessed using existing information or by information that could be feasibly gathered?

General Questions

6. Some departments may have goals that are not well captured by Refining Directions. If your department has such goals, please describe them. How might your department be assessed regarding the achievement of these goals?
7. Please make any other comments that you wish regarding the assessment of your department's contribution to the University.
8. Does your department have any comments regarding the assessment of the University as a whole with regard to teaching and learning, research, building "an inclusive community with a shared purpose" or in any other respect?

Appendix to Question 1: Links regarding methods of review

I) University Reviews of Academic Departments, which are internal to McMaster (even if they may use external reviewers) and are described at

<http://www.mcmaster.ca/univsec/policy/AcademicDeptRev.pdf>

(II) Ontario Council on Graduate Studies appraisals, which are external but are confined to graduate programs - see the template at:

<http://ocgs.cou.on.ca/bin/home/byLaws.cfm>

(III) the comparatively new (so that most departments may not have had one) Ontario Council of Academic Vice-Presidents undergraduate program reviews:

<http://www.cou.on.ca/bin/affiliates/associations/upracmain.cfm>