

Summary of Meeting of Task Force on Evaluation,
Accountability and Measurement
(Wednesday, December 3rd, 2008)

1. Susan Birnie, Andrea Farquhar, Milena Head, David Capson, Jennifer McKinnell, Bob McNutt, Karen Menard, Jackie Osterman, Lilian Scime and Mike Veall were in attendance. The Provost kindly attended by invitation.
2. The main purpose of the meeting was to discuss how to move forward with the Provost. The Task Force felt that it was important to understand how measures would be used before they were proposed. At an earlier meeting, a member had asked "What is the endgame?" and that was the gist of the main question to the Provost, particular in the context of recent events that had worsened the financial position of the university. A related worry was whether events had overtaken us.
3. The Provost acknowledged that recent financial events were likely to heighten concerns throughout the university. In terms of the committee's task, however, she was encouraged by the results of the survey the Task Force had conducted which demonstrated there was much common ground in departmental views about evaluation, accountability and measurement. She argued that the main advantages of improved measurement of departments were likely to be the illumination of problems, particularly problems common across units, and to help the various parts of the university to improve in a coordinated fashion. Specifically there was no intention to close academic programs unless there were good and sufficient reasons to close them.

At a previous meeting the Task Force had sought from the Provost a view as to how we related to other Task Forces. The Provost suggested that it seemed likely that the Task Force on Alternative Budget Models would propose a budget model with some envelope of discretionary funding to be used to address quality concerns. To do that, however, there needed to be some understanding of how to assess quality, and that she saw as the primary role of our Task Force. Our output would be an input for the new group considering the "Implementation Plan for Refining Directions".

4. In a related set of comments, the Provost emphasized that it was important using both internal and external information to determine what best practices for individual departments were in order to provide targets. The Provost encouraged the Task Force to seek one or two volunteer departments to engage in the exercise of proposing criteria for evaluation as a means of understanding and illustrating the process. The Task Force agreed to do that. For academic units, we will seek volunteers by asking the same departments who were asked to fill out the initial survey. For administrative units, it seemed sensible to continue with the unit that was furthest along in the "Inspiring Change" initiative, Parking and Security. Task Force member Lilian Scime was asked to discuss with the head of that unit and the Vice-President Administration whether Parking and Security would be willing to participate. (Ms. Scime subsequently has reported that it is willing; the Chair of the Task Force will meet with that unit's director.)

5. In other questions and general discussion with the Provost:

(a) the Provost reiterated her support for continued improvement in information systems within the university, even given budgetary challenges

(b) she agreed that the Task Force should emphasize using existing data as much as possible, with the G13 data and the "Globe and Mail" data as important candidates. (Karen Menard has agreed to take the lead in informing the Task Force regarding these data.)

(c) she shared the Task Force's view that "report overload" was a concern and thought it important that as the current OCGS review system is phased out and replaced by a system more like Undergraduate Program Review, that the opportunity be taken to consolidate and streamline the review of academic departments

(d) she reminded us of the importance of timeliness

6. The Task Force also continued to discuss the issue of a possible employee survey (noting for example that other organizations use this as a measurement tool) but the discussion was very brief because of time constraints.

7. After the Provost was thanked for her attendance and left, after very brief discussion it was decided that the "Chair's Report" from August 2008 would be taken as the Task Force's first report. The meeting then adjourned.