

Summary of meeting of the Task Force on Evaluation,
Accountability and Measurement
(Monday February 11, 2008 - 1pm to 2:30pm)

1. David Capson, Andrea Farquhar, Bradd Hart, Milena Head, David Hitchcock, Basel Jarrad, Aine Leadbetter, Jennifer McKinnell, Bob McNutt, Karen Menard, Linda Norek, Jackie Osterman and Lilian Scime were able to attend. Unfortunately a time had to be chosen to fit as many people as possible and Susan Birnie and Mita Giacomini were not available.

2. After introductions, there was a brief discussion of the Terms of Reference. One key point was raised. The Terms refer to "recommending how information should be used in any prioritization process", but it was decided that this would not rule out using the information much more broadly in other sorts of planning and managerial contexts.

3. The agenda flowed from the Terms of Reference. The first topic was consultation. The Chair was charged with drafting a request for general input from as many of the University community as possible. The draft would be circulated by email for approval by the Committee and the Provost and then issued.

4. It was decided that the Task Force should also consult with individual Departments and Units as to how they think they should be evaluated. One question was how far we should drill down. On the Academic side it seemed to me that most people felt that the focus should be on Departments (as opposed to say Faculties). There remains the question as to whether other sorts of Academic Units (e.g. programs, research institutes) should be engaged. The Chair was charged with discussing this latter issue with the Provost for guidance.

In this context it was discussed how to make this as easy as possible for Departments/Units to reply (the issue of "evaluation fatigue"). The Task Force also wanted to ensure it understood existing methods of assessment, which might in some cases make more assessment unnecessary.

The Chair undertook to write a draft survey that could be sent to Academic Units to solicit their views as to how they should be assessed. It was suggested that one result might be that Departments/Units would feel that they should be assessed in ways that are not in close alignment with Refining Directions. It was decided that would be useful information.

5. On the nonacademic side, there was uncertainty as to the appropriate level of evaluation. "Administration" as a whole was thought to be too big a group, but the optimal fineness of the divisions is not clear. Lilian Scime agreed to discuss this issue with leaders on the administrative side to see if this would provide useful guidance.

6. The consensus was to focus on internal consultation rather than involve external parties, at least at this stage.

The Chair undertook to meet with the Associate Vice-President Research regarding research measures and would be prepared to meet others, as necessary.

There was discussion of the need for staff support for the task force.

7. There was also discussion of the issue of reviewing data and informational gaps. Some key points:

(a) Refining Directions is oriented towards cross-university comparisons. A variety of ways were discussed to meet that challenge, using for example G-10 data, but it will not be easy.

(b) There was consensus that the University needs an information systems approach, greatly improving the accessibility and value of our current information. One aspect might be that Academic Departments fill out annual reports with much of the information pre-populated with values already in the system. Ease of compliance would reduce pushback. Data quality and timeliness would improve. Internal and external reporting could be aligned. This may be hard to achieve but the advantages are clear.

8. There was some discussion of conducting surveys of individuals outside McMaster (to assess say research reputation, consistent with a Refining Directions target). This may be reconsidered at a subsequent meeting. The potential importance of student surveys such as the National Survey of Student Engagement was discussed.

9. A meeting was scheduled for March 4 and March 19.