

Summary of Meeting of Task Force on Evaluation,
Accountability and Measurement
(Tuesday March 4, 2008 - 9am to 11am)

1. Susan Birnie, David Capson, David Hitchcock, Milena Head, Karen Menard, Jennifer McKinnell, Jackie Osterman, Lilian Scime and Mike Veall were able to attend. As usual for such meetings, it is impossible to find a time that all members may attend.
2. We briefly reviewed the feedback received so far in response to our e-mail solicitation. There were 6 responses circulated, a number quite helpful. The Chair asked whether a 7th response, a complaint about a particular administrator, should be circulated. It was agreed it should not be. While all responses had been acknowledged, in two cases the Committee asked the chair to send some information back to the respondents.
3. We decided that on our website we would post meeting reports.
http://www.mcmaster.ca/vpacademic/currentpriorities/Eval_%20Acount_Meas.html
4. The next item on our agenda was our linkage with Refining Directions and the degree to which we should be concentrating on the "goals" as opposed to the associated "targets". Divergence was noted between (a) the "innovative and stimulating learning environment" goal and the associated target to be "consistently among the top three Ontario Universities in terms of the quality of students we attract and graduate" as well as between (b) the "research results and reputation" goal and its second associated target that "McMaster's graduate population reaches 20% of the University's total full-time enrollment and is highly ranked in indicators of graduate educational excellence". It was noted that McMaster's graduate population has been expanding rapidly and would probably have reached the 20% number already (instead of the current 12.5%) if undergraduate enrolment had been stable. The conclusion was that we should focus primarily on the goals, with the targets potential but not exclusive measures.
5. The next item regarded consultation with nonacademic units about potential forms of assessment. Lilian Scime had undertaken to begin this consultation. She divided the consultation into three areas: Administration, Student Affairs and Advancement. She consulted with Karen Belaire regarding Administration and Phil Wood regarding Student Affairs. (She expects to report next meeting regarding Advancement.)

With respect to Administrative Units, there is a strategic plan for reviews that will be shared with the task force. There have been recent reviews of Parking and Transit Services and University Technology Services. At our next meeting we will go over one of those reviews (probably Parking) in some detail with the participants. This will not be a re-review of the Unit but rather an attempt to learn how such reviews work in practice. The committee is particularly interested in the "bottom-up" aspects. That is how a Unit's "customers" and front-line workers participated.

The Committee was pleased that such reviews were publicly available. It was discussed whether such reviews should be based on triggers or be periodic, with the general view being that the latter was preferable if possible.

With respect to Student Affairs, there is an annual report with substantial assessment material. There are also reports by the ancillary units. The Committee asked the Chair to go over some of that material to determine whether at a later date we should ask to meet with a representative of Student Affairs.

There is ongoing discussion in the Committee about the issue of the percentages of the budget that are devoted to various items, academic and nonacademic. Lilian Scime has undertaken to bring the latest information on this topic to a subsequent Committee meeting, ideally the next one. There was also brief discussion of the value of looking at "dollars per student" measures as well budget percentages.

6. There was also discussion of Units that are Academic but do not have academic programs themselves. One group of these (the Library, the Registrar, the School of Graduate Studies) reports to the Provost. The Chair was directed to discuss potential consultation with these units with the Provost. In the case of the Library, the Committee's suggestion was that the Chair meet with the Chief Librarian and other senior librarians.

7. With respect to academic units, the Chair had earlier circulated a draft survey that could potentially be sent to Departments, Areas and Schools (and perhaps with modifications to Faculties and Research Institutes). The purpose of the survey was to consult with such units as to how they might be evaluated. It was agreed that such a survey would be somewhat daunting for these units to receive but that, on balance, it was necessary in order to give those units that wanted to a chance to contribute to the discussion regarding their evaluation. Units may be reminded regarding a response but responses will not be mandatory in any sense.

The survey itself will probably be a Word document (as opposed to an online survey) to facilitate distribution and discussion within a unit, as well as to get it out more quickly.

A number of suggestions were made as to how to improve the survey. The Chair will implement them, discussing drafts with particular members and then circulate it to the Committee as a whole, as well as to the Provost.

The Chair will also undertake to form a small focus group of department chairs (or holders of related positions) to discuss the evaluation of academic units. He will report findings back to the Committee.

8. Our next meeting will be on March 19.