

Abstract: 2016 ELAM Institutional Action Project Symposium

Project Title: A faculty report card for measuring faculty productivity and facilitating faculty development

Name and Institution: Beth A. Virnig, PhD, MPH
University of Minnesota School of Public Health

Background, Challenge or Opportunity: Statistically, at the University of Minnesota, the average time spent at the rank of associate professor is over 12 years. Assessing and incenting faculty productivity, again particularly among faculty can be challenging to do in an unbiased, supportive manner. The UMN SPH tenure code requires faculty participate in both research and teaching activities. These activities can take place in a variety of ways and cannot be reduced to a single metric such as total dollars.

Purpose/Objectives: To develop a report that can be created for each tenured faculty member that provides individual faculty productivity metrics and average performance for their division and rank within division. This allows for productivity to be put into context.

Methods/Approach: I identified a series of possible ways that faculty could contribute to the research, teaching and faculty participation missions in the school, and assessed whether they could be readily and reliably measured using existing electronically available data. Of the 14 measures identified, I was able to identify an automated method for identifying all but two, need more local data collection for one and need to work with staff to improve data quality for one.

Assessing the utility of the approach was undertaken using several strategies— eight associate professors were given the opportunity to see their performance and reflect upon whether they felt it was a fair summary of their activity and were asked whether anything was missing. As a second strategy, reports were generated for fourteen associate professors spanning the four divisions. They were not identified individually but rather as “faculty #n” this allowed the Dean and the division heads to separate their evaluation of the objective data from their perceptions of the person and their importance.

Outcomes and Evaluation Strategy: Some of the teaching related measures might need fine tuning or combination—credits taught, students taught and total tuition revenue. The reports were viewed as being helpful and providing information that could be used in a variety of ways—providing a focal point for discussions with unproductive faculty, drawing attention to faculty who meet basic financial productivity metrics but whose activities (e.g., balance between teaching and research) would make promotion challenging, drawing attention to faculty whose level of productivity across all or some metrics pointed to strong potential for burn-out. Overall, everyone agreed that graphic displays of a range of activities combined with comparators provide a valuable structure for conversation and future planning. It was expressed that conversations would have to be careful and interpretation guided since some people will worry if they are not above average on every metric (a very Minnesotan Lake Woebegone problem).

In summary, the primary limitation to immediate release of the report card is concerns about data quality and completeness. However, once that problem is solved, the reports look to be an important addition to our faculty productivity assessment. Key strengths of the reports are the variety of metrics they measure, their large reliance on available information and the inclusion of comparisons within division and by rank.



A faculty report card for measuring faculty productivity and facilitating faculty development

Beth A. Virnig, PhD, M.P.H.

University of Minnesota School of Public Health, Minneapolis, MN

Abstract

Background, Challenge or Opportunity:

Statistically, at the university of Minnesota, the average time spent at the rank of associate professor is over 12 years. Assessing and incenting faculty productivity, again particularly among faculty can be challenging to do in an unbiased, supportive manner. The UMN SPH tenure code requires faculty participate in both research and teaching activities. These activities can take place in a variety of ways and cannot be reduced to a single metric such as total dollars.

Purpose/Objectives: To develop a report that can be created for each tenured faculty member that provides individual faculty productivity metrics and average performance for their division and rank within division. This allows for productivity to be put into context.

Methods/Approach:

I identified a series of possible ways that faculty could contribute to the research, teaching and faculty participation missions in the school, and assessed whether they could be readily and reliably measured using existing electronically available data. Of the 14 measures identified, I was able to identify an automated method for identifying all but two, need more local data collection for one and need to work with staff to improve data quality for one.

Assessing the utility of the approach was undertaken using several strategies— eight associate professors were given the opportunity to see their performance and reflect upon whether they felt it was a fair summary of their activity and were asked whether anything was missing. As a second strategy, reports were generated for fourteen associate professors spanning the four divisions. They were not identified individually but rather as “faculty #n” this allowed the Dean and the division heads to separate their evaluation of the objective data from their perceptions of the person and their importance.

Outcomes and Evaluation Strategy:

Some of the teaching related measures might need fine tuning or combination— credits taught, students taught and total tuition revenue. The reports were viewed as being helpful and providing information that could be used in a variety of ways— providing a focal point for discussions with unproductive faculty, drawing attention to faculty who meet basic financial productivity metrics but whose activities (e.g., balance between teaching and research) would make promotion challenging, drawing attention to faculty whose level of productivity across all or some metrics pointed to strong potential for burn-out. Overall, everyone agreed that graphic displays of a range of activities combined with comparators provide a valuable structure for conversation and future planning. It was expressed that conversations would have to be careful and interpretation guided since some people will worry if they are not above average on every metric (a very Minnesotan Lake Wobegone problem).

In summary, the primary limitation to immediate release of the report card is concerns about data quality and completeness. However, once that problem is solved, the reports look to be an important addition to our faculty productivity assessment. Key strengths of the reports are the variety of metrics they measure, their large reliance on available information and the inclusion of comparisons within division and by rank.

The Reports

Measures:

Items with Available Data

- Total Revenue (all sources)/% of salary covered by activities
- Credits Taught
- Students Taught
- Tuition \$
- Total publications (3 year)
- First Authored Publications (3 year)
- % of Salary Covered by sponsored funds
- Proposals submitted as PI/as Co-I (2 separate years)
- Student advising (masters and PhD)
- Commencement Attendance (3 year)
- School or University Service

Items that need manual data collection or more work regarding interpretation:

- Manuscripts in support of a student first author
- Manuscripts with a student as co-author
- Service to Division, School, University
- Supervision of Master’s Projects

Key Innovations:

- Directly link to activities associated with Tenured Faculty status
- Comprehensive
- Comparative

Possible advice stemming from reports:

- Keep up the good work
- Increase teaching/student related activities including advising
- Seek more research leadership activities (PI on grant, first author on paper)
- Increase scholarly activities (publications, grant participation)
- Give something up. There are too many balls in the air, high risk for burnout (overall or within one category of activity)
- Your level of production in all areas is too low

Next steps:

- Explore new measures related to community/professional service and teaching quality
- Review reports with faculty Appointment, Promotion and Tenure (APT) committee
- Develop written guide for interpreting measures
- Finish data quality audits, investigate best way to collect data that is presently manually collected
- Present reports at faculty meetings
- Begin using reports as basis for meetings between Associate Professors and Sr. Associate Dean (required to complete UM form 13)
- Revisit reports and their value for faculty feedback after one year

