

Faculty Activity Measurement System Steering Committee

June 21, 2010, 10 a.m., Provost's Conference Room, Strong Hall

Members and Staff Present:

Steve Warren, Chair; Diane Goddard, Barbara Romzek, Ben Eggleston, Joshua Rosenbloom, Bob Collins, Deb Teeter, Ryan Cherland, Mary Lee Hummert, Paul Terranova, Julie Loats, Kevin Boatright

Background

The Steering Committee, which held an informal organizational meeting on May 25, was created by Chancellor Bernadette Gray-Little in response to the report of her Task Force on Research Engagement http://www.chancellor.ku.edu/strategic/re_task_force_report.pdf. She asked Steve Warren, Vice Provost for Research and Graduate Studies, to chair the committee, which will work with the Office of Institutional Research and Planning and others "to develop a KU database that will allow us to systematically collect information on research output. Once the database is developed it will provide the opportunity for not only an objective assessment of where we are, but also for realistic goals setting and periodic review of our performance."

Introduction and Agenda

Steve Warren welcomed the group and members introduced themselves. The purpose of the meeting was to refine the outcomes members would like an integrated faculty activity reporting system to support. In other words, what questions does the proposed system need to be able to answer and at what levels? Earlier, members were asked to submit a list of desired outcomes, and these were circulated in advance of the meeting. Warren noted a lot of similarity among the lists. Ben Eggleston had also been asked to draft a list of principles that should guide the system. This list was circulated in advance as well.

Steve proposed the following as a tentative agenda for the meeting:

1. Discussion of proposed outcomes
2. Discussion of approaches and products used by other universities or marketed by vendors
3. Considerations in the creation of a stakeholder group to inform our efforts
4. Creation of a presence on the Chancellor's website
5. Next steps:
 - a. Consolidation of system requirements
 - b. Follow out with vendors and other universities
 - c. Date of the next meeting

Discussion of Proposed Outcomes

Initial group discussion centered on the content of the system, how that content will be entered and updated, how it will be verified, who may access it, and how it will be used.

An issue will be getting faculty to keep their information current. The system can be pre-populated with information, with faculty having the opportunity to modify or update what's entered. Someone would have to do the pre-population, and that may involve an expense.

Questions arose: what data sources are authoritative if the information entered differs from what is recorded in a dean's office? There's a need for a reconciliation process. While the best source is the individual faculty member, he-she also has an annual review where information can be validated. Any data faculty enter are expected to be true and accurate. Nonetheless, they should be advised that data are subject to verification and audit. The pre-population can include courses taught and doctoral students advised, but faculty will have to enter other information on their own.

Information contained in the system could be made public in summary form. Information specific to individuals would not be made public. This is not a personnel file. Ideally, the information contained in the system would only need to be entered once. In some respects, it's like posting one's CV on a KU website.

Changes made in the system should feed back to the source of the data, e.g., teaching load, so that the source can be corrected. We want to have one version of the "truth." Ideally, teaching load discrepancies could be corrected by the 20th day of classes for comparison purposes. Another example: an individual's sponsored projects information, as stated in the CV, doesn't always correspond with the records held by the KU Center for Research.

Ohio State is rolling out a comparable system, but it's intended primarily for new faculty and those who are up for promotion and tenure. It will be important to consider how we should stage the introduction of a KU system.

A good indicator of engagement can be the number and type of grant proposals submitted. This is appropriate so long as it's understood that just trying to obtain a grant isn't enough. It was noted that one unit responded to this by generating a large number of proposals that had little chance of success.

"Principles That Should Guide the System"

Discussion shifted to this document. Eggleston said he tried to be concerned about the need for faculty to buy into the system and be willing participants, in order to allay fears about the control and transparency of the data. The principles are as follows:

1. The database should be self-explanatory. Many of KU's systems - ARTS, DEMIS, even Enroll & Pay - fall short of the standards of clarity and usability that this system should meet.
2. A faculty member's entire "file" should be transparent to the faculty member in question and the faculty member should be able to export it (in its entirety) to a format that could be read outside the software of the database (e.g., a PDF file).
3. A faculty member should be able to enter information about a particular publication, presentation, class, or service activity in an open-ended way if the fields meant to organize such information do not seem, to the faculty member, to accommodate what the faculty member is reporting.
4. Anything a faculty member enters into the database should later be capable of being revised or deleted by the faculty member.

5. A faculty member should have the ability to upload PDF or Word files of publications, syllabi, course handouts, and other documents and have them linked to specific items entered in the database.
6. A faculty member should have the ability to upload a file containing his or her CV organized in his or her preferred way (which might vary with the faculty member's discipline or the faculty member's professional emphases). That is, if the system has a "CV generator", that should not trump the faculty member's own representation of his or her career in a CV organized as he or she thinks appropriate.
7. If faculty members' records might contain information added by others, it should be visible to the faculty member, and appropriate policies should be developed to determine who can add any information to anyone else's record.
8. If the system is capable of handling teaching-evaluation data from a particular form (e.g., the current university form), this should not lead to pressure to use that form being placed on faculty members who use other forms, such as discipline-specific ones developed by their departments.
9. If the system is used as part of the annual merit evaluation process and/or the P&T process, a faculty member should have the ability to see and assemble the relevant materials in a format (such as a PDF file) that can be both "submitted" electronically within the system and exported so that the faculty member has a separate record of what was submitted (which can be read outside of the software of the database). That is, annual reports and P&T materials should not just be "harvested" from the information that a faculty member has entered into the database.

Warren said we should assume the system is not connected to the confidential personnel file, which may include information about health and other issues. The system can be used by a faculty member to generate information for the annual performance evaluation. In this respect, it was likened to a performance improvement plan. This would also be useful to a merit review committee that is making peer-to-peer judgments. Departments would not be forced to use the system, however. The system would serve as a profile, possibly including actual publications and grants via ScholarWorks. A second step would be a portfolio, which could include non-quantifiable examples of engagement, e.g., in the arts.

The system could collect data over time so that we can see what's improving or not improving. It could also provide a snapshot of what's happening at any given time campuswide.

Warren noted the overlap in group members' submitted suggestions, and offered some general observations. We should:

- Build a system that can do everything we've discussed, potentially;
- Expect to live with the system for a long time;
- Impose no restrictive limitations starting out;
- Be able to cut and chop data many different ways;
- Not need to go through and make choices now, since we could do it all;
- Seek the most flexible system we can think of;
- Not anticipate 10 years down the line, since we really can't;
- Acknowledge that people will change, whereas the need for data analysis will remain; and
- Recognize that the types of data we want could change over time.

Vendor Discussion

Members continued the conversation on the pros and cons of vendors they were familiar with who could provide this kind of system. Questions included who owns the data in the system (KU does) and the ability to pull in and organize external information, e.g., citation data.

It was agreed we're likely to find a vendor who can do this for us, vs. KU creating a system from scratch. In the next few months, there should be a discussion with every vendor who's out there. Don't rush into a solution. Describe what we want and have all of the vendors present. It's a rapidly changing situation. We should be able to make a case for the best system.

Vendors may also have other suggestions for us. They probably know the answers to a lot of the questions we have. Vendors will also give us a list of their subscribers. Security is a big issue. There's a need to establish who can do what with the data, e.g., see, edit, add, etc.

Deb Teeter will convene an *ad hoc* subcommittee to develop a system specifications sheet. Other members will be Hummert, Rosenblum, Loats, Cherland, Eggleston, and Terry Turner from KUMC. The subcommittee will turn today's discussion into a document that says "Here's what we want re: pre-population, security, external links, flexibility, etc." This should be done in the next few weeks for distribution to vendors by mid-to-late August.

Creation of a Stakeholder Group

Members felt it would be useful to have vendor demonstrations of the ease of populating their systems. There is time to put together a stakeholder group and have it organized by the time vendors make presentations. Vendors could provide a shell version and the group would populate it as a test to help determine whether the system is as facile as we want.

A stakeholder group should be recruited soon. Members are asked to submit nominations to Warren by July 15. The composition of the group will be determined at the July 23 meeting. The group could include 50-100 people. It should focus on full-time, tenure-track faculty, and should be balanced by rank, department-school affiliation, diversity, etc. It's OK to ask deans, center directors and governance leaders for 3-5 nominations each. If they nominate someone, have them state why they're doing so. The group should also include some IT-technical staff people.

Consider how the group will be used, e.g., focus groups, small-group discussion, a series of meetings, large groups? It was suggested that stakeholders would come to one of two initial meetings, one at KUMC and one at Lawrence. There'd be no breakout meetings, per se. Tell them "Now you're on a list" and invite them to provide ongoing input. The group would meet in person one to three times, and there'd be further contact in the future.

Other Business

Minutes of this and future Steering Committee meetings will be posted on the Chancellor's web page as soon as possible.

The meeting adjourned at 11:20 a.m. The next meeting is Friday, July 23, from 1:30 to 3 p.m. in the Provost's Conference Room, Strong Hall.