

Chapter 9

Fair Process in Assessing the Quality of University Faculty

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents an exploratory research framework designed to support quality assessment of faculty in higher education. First, a neutral view of a university is developed which highlights five essential business capabilities, including teaching, research, advising, advocacy, and convening. Activity models are constructed for each capability – identifying inputs, activities, and outputs. Faculty preparation and contributions to inputs, activities, and outputs/outcomes are modeled and described. Deming’s model of quality is applied to the five activity models. The quality model is applied to faculty (e.g., tenure and tenure-track, non-tenure track, adjunct, graduate students, clinical, and other specialized faculty). Finally, the research explores whether the current quality management processes are fair for faculty and effective for the university’s stakeholders. The exploratory research offers six observations and recommendations. The most significant observation is that only one of the five business capabilities – research has a fair and effective quality process.

INTRODUCTION

Quality has always been an important factor in higher education. Quality of education is a competitive factor and a comparative advantage for universities. Over the past sixty years education has been within reach of a significant portion of the population. The demand for higher education has continued to increase. The increase is not limited to the traditional high school graduating base or traditional “college age” populations. In the first quarter of the 21st century, advanced learning is now understood to be both lifelong and lifewide. Who is learning has changed dramatically. The demand for higher education has been addressed not only by an increase in the number of colleges and universities, but in alternative forms and access. As a result, who is producing and who is consuming higher education has changed significantly.

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In this context of change, the concept of quality may also be shifting. This chapter focuses on the most important quality element of higher education – faculty – and considers how the definition and perspective on quality might be shifting. Who is delivering higher education and why will affect the criteria we use to judge quality. Who is paying for education will affect how quality is measured and judged. Who teaches and who learns will affect how quality is assessed. How we define and assess research quality will be judged by who conducts research. Who does what kinds of research will also affect the research literacies that faculty and researchers bring to the university. Will these reflect traditional research quality criteria? Where people are learning will affect the quality of delivery channels or learning environments. And, perhaps most important from a faculty perspective – how do these changes affect the quality and balance of competencies one faculty is expected to bring to higher education.

We care about these changes and their effect on quality because quality is defined by stakeholders, stakeholder expectations and the value we deliver to stakeholders. Where stakeholder shift, quality processes may also shift. We care about these changes because quality is defined by the context in which we deliver value. As the context changes, so will the definition and assessment of quality change. Finally, universities and colleges have had few competitors in the past. Quality has been defined by universities for their audiences and populations. With a broadening market, universities and colleges may need to consider how quality is being defined by players beyond their traditional boundaries.

Universities are and have always been complex operations – they do many things and serve many stakeholders. The expanding boundaries of higher education have highlighted the fact that faculty quality criteria and assessment have been focused primarily on research and teaching. As teaching is increasingly handed off to adjuncts, graduate students and specialized staff, quality increases focuses on research. This paper begins with the assumption that it is important to view quality more broadly – to consider quality for all of the roles that faculty play. In fact, we suggest that as the boundaries of higher education expand, the quality criteria and methods of higher education provided a strong foundation for assessing the quality of all providers.

Higher education quality management is a challenging question because universities and higher education ultimately produce and consume people – educated people and knowledge. We focus this chapter on the quality process as it pertains to one of the universities primary stakeholders and inputs – faculty. We consider faculty quality from the perspective of the primary business areas or capabilities that a university performs.

In 2019 the general public assumes that our higher education faculty represents the best and the brightest minds of the country. In order to maintain this stock of high quality intellectual capital colleges and universities must have rigorous and sustainable quality management processes in place for faculty – for recruiting, developing, leveraging and retaining faculty. This chapter is an exploration of what those processes are today and what they will need to be in the future. We begin by considering the nature of higher education business. Understanding higher education as a business is essential for applying widely accepted quality management models and methods. This chapter leverages the well-established quality assessment methods used in business and industry. The chapter also considers whether the quality assessment models and methods are fair and effective. We consider fairness in relation to the faculty who are being assessed. We consider effectiveness in relation to the college and university that is being assessed. We consider fairness and effectiveness at the business capability level. We also consider whether the current quality and fairness models likely to sustain in the changing context of higher education.

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