Revising Faculty Performance Evaluations: Not for the Faint of Heart

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Abstract - In many structured organizations, the instrument used to help guide behaviors and appropriately reward employees is a periodic performance evaluation. Academia, however, presents a unique set of challenges for the evaluation process. For example, academic freedom is an important concept in a University setting and yet a unified vision is crucial for organizational growth and harmony. Faculty evaluations, when carefully devised and used appropriately, can deter complacency and elucidate the faculty member's role in accomplishing the mission and goals of the school.

The School of Engineering at Mercer University is currently embarking on a process of assessing and revising its faculty performance evaluation procedures and guidelines. This process includes benchmarking faculty performance procedures from schools within Mercer's peer group, and conducting a literature review to help guide the current course of action.

This paper highlights some of the issues identified and discussed by Mercer's engineering faculty members who were tasked to revise the evaluation process. The paper will also categorize faculty performance evaluation procedures at several other engineering schools of similar stature.

INTRODUCTION

Performance evaluation is a fact of life for most people employed in private, non-profit, or government organizations. The evaluation is used for any number of purposes, such as rewarding competence and diligence, facilitating professional growth, identifying areas for improvement, and even documenting cause for termination [1]. In academia, the purposes of the evaluation for faculty are similar to those listed above; however, the notions of tenure, accountability, and faculty governance introduce additional complexity that often requires special consideration. Seldin [2] identifies three broad reasons to evaluate faculty: 1) to improve performance for the benefit of the school and the individual, 2) to assist in personnel decisions such as promotion and tenure, and 3) to provide data to external groups such as boards of trustees or even parents.

The science and art of faculty performance evaluation has been the focus of academic research for fifty years or more. Gustad [3] and Astin and Lee [4] queried a large number of senior-level university administrators regarding the relative importance of department heads, informal student opinion, and other various pieces of information that are used in the process. These early studies indicated that the most important component was the opinion of department heads, but by the 1970s, emphasis had begun to shift toward systematic student ratings, publications, and grant support [5-7]. Centra [8], in his landmark study for the Graduated Records Examination Board, surveyed over 450 department heads across all disciplines and discovered that classroom teaching (rated systematically), number of publications, and quality of publications were the most important criteria used for evaluating faculty performance. Service activities and personality factors were among the least important.

More recent research has focused on redefining scholarly activity to include the scholarship of teaching [9-12], advising [13,14], and service [15-17]. However, what remains true today is a fact that was learned over 30 years ago: the evaluation of research, scholarship, and service is wholly dependent upon the culture and vision of the faculty member's department and institution.

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In the formative years at the Mercer University School of Engineering (MUSE), there was little discrepancy among the faculty that the school's focus should be on teaching, the curriculum, recruiting, and retention. As the school has matured and developed sound programs, growth and recognition have assumed a more dominant role when defining progress and as MUSE strives to compete for top students. In this transition period, MUSE is contemplating the significance of a cultural shift toward a more pronounced research emphasis.

The next section of this paper presents an overview of MUSE—including its culture, strengths, and opportunities for improvement -- from inception to the 2008-2009 AY. The remainder describes recent efforts of the MUSE faculty to redefine the manner in which assistant, associate, and full professors are evaluated in view of organizational vision, academic freedom, and criteria for promotion and tenure.

MUSE BACKGROUND AND CURRENT STATUS

Founded in 1985, MUSE provides high quality Bachelor's and Master's degree programs in engineering and related disciplines that meet the needs of students and prospective employers. Over 1800 undergraduate and graduate degrees have been awarded in biomedical, computer, electrical, environmental, industrial, mechanical, and software engineering, as well as software systems, industrial management, engineering management, and technical communication.

Since its inception, the major strength of MUSE has been the ability of its faculty to deliver high-quality, undergraduate instruction in each of the disciplines listed above. MUSE graduates are strong; and there is ample anecdotal evidence to suggest that local/regional employers and graduate schools value the skill set these students possess. Success has been achieved in this area (teaching) primarily because the faculty has placed a significant emphasis on it, often to the detriment of other worthwhile activities, such as scholarship, technical competence, and service. Some specific examples include:

- Minimal levels of national/professional service
- Low funded grant activity (dollars awarded per faculty member)
- Low faculty publication rate (number of publications per faculty member)

The bulleted examples above demonstrate a current MUSE culture that undervalues or precludes scholarly activity for the sake of teaching excellence. In today's lackluster economy and highly competitive marketplace, to attract the very best students, it is unclear whether the academic environment and culture of MUSE is sustainable. This notion reflects the belief that the top high school students and undergraduates are influenced by faculty research activity and the opportunity to work on interesting projects [18].

Currently, MUSE operates under a faculty workload reporting scheme in which a faculty member identifies his/her goals in the areas of teaching, scholarly activity, technical competence, and service to the department chair and/or the Dean. The evaluator (i.e., the chair or Dean), using largely subjective criteria, determines the goals to be either "Acceptable" or "Unacceptable" and communicates that information back to the faculty member. At the end of the academic year, the faculty member and the evaluator reconvene to assess accomplishments relative to the stated goals. In general, there has been minimal upfront and formal guidance from the evaluator regarding the appropriateness of the faculty member's stated goals nor is performance officially evaluated or rated. The current procedure does not necessarily promote individual faculty growth, or insure that that the faculty member's goals are compatible with the vision of MUSE and/or the University. The current MUSE Goals and Accomplishments Form is provided in Appendix A.

In order to improve its competitive position, and to become more widely recognized as a preeminent engineering institution, MUSE has recently considered modifying its approach to undergraduate education. In this new scheme, for example, it is desirable that faculty are encouraged and supported in their scholarly endeavors to pursue external research funding, industrial and/or government consulting, entrepreneurial activities and recruiting and retention efforts, while preserving their core strength of teaching. These changes require a number of important concessions: (1) limited resources must be redistributed, (2) teaching loads must be reduced, (3) the grant submission process must be streamlined, (4) alignment with University Admissions must be improved, and (5) a realistic guide of faculty expectations must be adopted, in which merit raises, promotion, and tenure are linked.

The next section describes a suggested process for re-evaluating and revising a faculty performance evaluation procedure. This process evolved through deliberations of the ad-hoc committee tasked with reviewing and revising MUSE's current forms and procedures.

PROCESS FOR REVISING FACULTY PERFORMANCE PROCEDURES

At the annual MUSE faculty retreat that takes place the week before classes begin in the Fall, the Dean presented the idea of developing a new, formal faculty evaluation procedure. Shown below are the recommended steps underpinning such an endeavor.

Step 1: Form a committee. While it is cliché to say that a committee has to be formed to evaluate every new idea, altering the way a faculty has been evaluated with the intent of changing behavior is not an insignificant undertaking. Obtaining initial buy-in by involving this faculty committee develops internal "champions." The volunteer MUSE committee included assistant, associate and full professors representing each MUSE academic department.

Step 2: Create clear and unambiguous goals for the new performance evaluation process. For the MUSE committee, this led to the development of three simple statements:

A. Insure that the process facilitates faculty career development
B. Insure that the process provides guidance to faculty on activities which benefit and align with the school's goals.
C. Insure that the process aligns with promotion and tenure review

Step 3: Obtain feedback: Committee members should obtain feedback from their departments to the new ideas. Feedback is necessary to realize and understand a broad set of concerns and ideas, however 100% buy-in should not be expected. Initial feedback obtained by the MUSE committee ranged from favorable, to resignation, to discomfort and dislike. The dislike appeared to be focused around "where do I fit?" or "we're not broke so don't fix us".

Step 4: Review literature: Much literature is available on the topics of faculty performance. Reviewing this literature will provide additional insight. The literature reviewed by the MUSE committee has been discussed in a previous section.

Step 5: Benchmark: Benchmarking is a common practice to evaluate how your organization compares to peer or aspiration organizations. The benchmarking performed by the MUSE committee is discussed in the next section.

Step 6: Develop new forms and procedures: Based on the literature review, benchmarking, faculty feedback, and school vision, create forms and procedures which address the committee's goals.

Completion of steps 1-6 is a rational course of action to discern the critical factors and promote appropriate discussion. The following sections present the results of the benchmarking exercise and recommendations provided by the ad-hoc MUSE committee.

BENCHMARKING PEER INSTITUTIONS

MUSE faculty solicited and obtained formally documented evaluation procedures from nine "peer and aspiration" schools. All nine schools returned, essentially, different versions of faculty activity report forms. In addition, some schools also provided detailed documentation and rationale for their forms and processes. Each form obtained was reviewed and grouped into two major categories.

The first group (category A) consisted of activity report forms that provided general guidance instructing faculty to provide evidence of activity in the school's primary areas of interest. In general, these forms were open-ended and

provided minimal guidance relative to the specific activities that are considered valuable. Five of the nine solicited schools use this minimal guidance approach, which is similar to the current MUSE form provided in Appendix A.

The second group (category B) consisted of activity forms that listed major headings (e.g., teaching, scholarship, service), subheadings (e.g., undergraduate research supervision, publications), and requested documented evidence in each area. If, for example, a faculty member had no activity to report under a specific subheading, it would show up as obvious white space in the document. The remaining four solicited schools use this approach, with varying degrees of specificity. One institution in particular that used category B forms was quite prescriptive and provided reasonably detailed examples of acceptable evidence, as well as a weighting factor applicable to each subheading. An example of a category B form, recently developed by the ad-hoc performance evaluation committee at MUSE, is provided in Appendix B.

Two major conclusions were drawn from the benchmarking activity. First, all nine forms were similar in that they were self-reporting, provided evidence of activity, listed teaching as the first area of performance, and included scholarship and service. Second, the category B forms were more instructive in that they helped faculty more readily identify strengths and weakness in their activity. The category A forms could provide a false sense of accomplishment by allowing the faculty member to provide voluminous evidence of achievement in one or more areas that do not necessarily benefit the school's vision.

A new faculty evaluation process for MUSE, specifically related to the information gleaned from the benchmarking exercise and literature review, is further explored in the following section.

MUSE PROPOSAL FOR FACULTY EVALUATION

Through the process outlined above, the ad-hoc performance committee has identified the importance of guidance and mentoring, of feedback through annual performance evaluations, of contributing to a school vision, and of declaring the process in the faculty handbook as part of the school's operating procedures. It is hoped that frequent evaluations of performance will direct and reward the efforts of faculty in support of a unified vision.

In addition to the traditional reviews and recommendations by a promotion and tenure committee, the ad-hoc committee recommends that annual performance evaluations of each faculty member assess the individual's reported contributions to a school vision. Faculty members will submit an annual report of professional activities following a format with specific guidelines. Performance evaluations, conducted by the Dean, will serve as a basis for merit raises and will be available to appropriate deliberations of the promotion and tenure committee. Individual performance evaluations will remain subjective to some degree, without absolute metrics separating performance ratings such as poor or good. Thus, generating performance ratings remains an administrative responsibility. However, expectations will be declared for the faculty as a whole with detailed metrics in a five-year vision statement for the school. The vision then serves as leverage for performance ratings and becomes the crux for faculty success and school progress.

Implementing the process will involve four documents: a school vision statement, an activities report form, a Likert scale evaluation form, and addendums to the faculty handbook. The school vision statement will be created and maintained by the faculty and must provide metrics for the five-year goals of the school, such as number of archival journal publications and the total number of students. A sample vision statement is shown in Appendix C, featuring metrics for the current status of the school, the ideal future state and the proposed achievable state within five years. The activities report form will be sufficiently prescriptive to guide and suggest activities supporting the vision while revealing omissions of high value activities as well. A sample activities form, shown in the Appendix B, lists suggested activities for teaching, scholarship, technical competence, and service. An evaluation rubric, shown in Appendix D, will record ratings of each faculty member's performance in teaching, in scholarship and technical competency, and in service on a Likert-scale declaring poor, good, very good, and excellent. Finally, the faculty handbook must be appended to acknowledge the performance evaluations, charge the faculty to maintain an appropriately useful vision statement, and permit the promotion and tenure committee access to performance evaluations.

LESSONS LEARNED

While this paper discusses a recommended process and some satisfactory results, the experience of the ad-hoc committee was not without setbacks. One particular area of consternation was that the committee began the effort of reviewing and revising the evaluation process without a vision statement. MUSE has a broad mission statement, but has no vision statement with specific goals. The committee found that it was not possible to create the more prescriptive activity report provided in Appendix B without a clear vision of what activities are valued. Thus, the committee operated inefficiently until the vision statement provided in Appendix C was adopted.

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APPENDIX A

MUSE Faculty Goals and Accomplishments Self-evaluation Report

Name: _____ Present Rank: _____
Date Promoted or Planned: _____
Date Tenured or Planned: _____
Date this Document Completed by Faculty Member: _____
Date Evaluation Meeting Complete: _____

Check area for meritorious performance for promotion in addition to Teaching Effectiveness

X **Teaching Effectiveness**

Provide evidence of sustained attention to improving teaching effectiveness, as demonstrated in the assessment of student learning, traditional classroom activities, advising, participating in student design activities, supervising undergraduate and/or graduate research, developing or revising courses for classroom or distance delivery, etc.

GOALS	ACCOMPLISHMENTS
Comments by Evaluator:	*Comments by Evaluator:*

❑ **Technical Competence and Currency**

*Provide evidence of continuing education **In discipline area** as demonstrated by activities such as research and/or practice, high-level consulting, participation in short courses and seminars, symposia, attaining advanced credentials or licenses, and experiences in industry, education, or government.*

GOALS	ACCOMPLISHMENTS
Comments by Evaluator:	*Comments by Evaluator:*

❑ **Scholarship**

Provide evidence of scholarship through original research, interdisciplinary research, applied research and/or educational research as demonstrated by publications, presentations and/or projects that have been peer reviewed.

GOALS	ACCOMPLISHMENTS
Comments by Evaluator:	*Comments by Evaluator:*

❑ **Service**

Provide specific evidence of service to the profession, the department or school, the university, and the community.

GOALS	ACCOMPLISHMENTS
Comments by Evaluator:	*Comments by Evaluator:*

APPENDIX B

MUSE - Faculty Member Report of Professional Activities
This report covers the academic year _____
Name: _____ Academic Rank: _____
Department: _____ Number of Years at MUSE: ___

Awards: List any awards or recognition you received this year:

I) Teaching Effectiveness

A) **Course-related documentation of teaching effectiveness** – In the space provided below, please describe the specific teaching duties you've completed and teaching effectiveness activities you've instituted during this academic year. List and provide details (evidence) for these kinds of activities:

- Developed, applied, and assessed a new pedagogical technique for one or more classes
- Incorporated and assessed the use of a new instructional technology in one or more courses
- Identified and implemented teaching refinements based on the documented assessment of student learning in one or more courses
- Developed and delivered a new course or a significant course revision for the curriculum (departmental or MUSE, undergraduate or graduate)
- Gathered evidence of outstanding classroom performance through invited peer feedback on select course lectures and course materials
- Demonstrated contribution to an engineering education project, collaborative or individual
- Other course-related activities that show serious attention to improving teaching effectiveness

List Course-Related Activities with Descriptions

Summary of Courses and Laboratories Taught This Year
List undergraduate courses first, then graduate courses.
Total hours for each separate term, including summer.

Term	Course #	Course Title	Credit Hours	Students Enrolled	New or Repeat	Comments

B) Student Research – Please describe work with undergraduate or graduate students in research projects, internships, fieldwork, or independent studies.

C) Advising & Mentoring – Please report these kinds of activities:

- Give the number of students you advised this academic year, and describe specific extra mentoring you provided beyond scheduling assistance.
- List and describe your efforts serving as Client/Adviser for senior design projects

D) Describe a plan for Curricular and Teaching Development for the next academic year.

Evaluator response to proposed plan:

II) **Scholarship Documentation** –Describe your **peer reviewed** scholarly work; that is, work that requires a high level of expertise, breaks new ground, can be replicated, can be peer reviewed, is innovative, or has significant impact. For each item submitted, please indicate which of the following categories are appropriate for that item: 1. Scholarship of Discovery ("Research"), 2. Scholarship of Integration, 3. Scholarship of Application, 4. Scholarship of Teaching.

A) Publications—list printed journal articles appearing or accepted during this academic year, giving complete citations with a 2-3 sentence annotation for each.

B) Articles Submitted—list journal articles that have been submitted for peer review (same format as above).

C) Books or Book Chapters—list with complete citations and 2-3 sentence annotation for each, giving the authors or editors names.

D) Conference Presentations/ Proceedings Publications—list with complete citations, giving complete conference title, place, and sponsoring organization; indicate if paper was peer reviewed and distributed via print, online archive, or CD.

E) Proposals and Grants—list those submitted or awarded; indicate your specific contribution for each one.

Grant Submissions This Academic Year

Sponsor or Funding Agency	Title	P.I. (list if multiples)	Your Role	Amount Requested or Awarded	Status

F) Describe a plan for scholarship advancement during the next academic year.

Evaluator response to proposed plan:

III) Technical Competence and Currency

Within my department or MUSE, my specific area(s) of technical expertise are these:

_____

A) **Technical Competency Documentation** – In the space provided, please provide complete information about projects contributing towards your professional competence and currency within this academic year. Such projects may relate to (but are not limited to) these kinds of activities:

- Provided high-level consulting expertise—that is, advances the profession or improves practice (list subject, client, and describe briefly)
- Participated in short courses and workshops; indicate sponsor, topic, and time involved
- Attained advanced credentials or licenses (list and describe briefly)
- Gained technical experience working in industry (identify companies, topics, and contributions)
- Completed a summer research/technical faculty fellowship; indicate sponsor, topic, and time involved
- Demonstrated significant contribution to collaborative research effort (identify collaborators, topics, and contributions)
- Technical reports, monographs, or patents
- Other development activities directed towards maintaining and advancing one or more of your specific area(s) of technical expertise

List Technical-Competency Activities with Descriptions

B) Describe a plan or primary focus for professional competence and currency advancement during the next academic year.

Evaluator response to proposed plan:

IV) Service Documentation—Describe leadership or contributions resulting in substantial impact to the following groups. Identify roles and specific contributions. Include such efforts that

- create international opportunities for students and/or outreach to expand the reputation of MUSE
- support the recruiting and retention of superior students
- manage and maintain departmental laboratory space and equipment
- contribute significantly to the decisions and development of curriculum
- demonstrate outstanding administrative performance
- support issues of faculty governance and/or university interaction
- contribute to the assessment activities in preparation for ABET and SACS

A) Committee service activities

Summary of Committee Service This Year

MUSE, UNIV, or Society	Role Chair, or other leadership	Committee	Contributions to committee activities	Committee Accomplishment	Comments

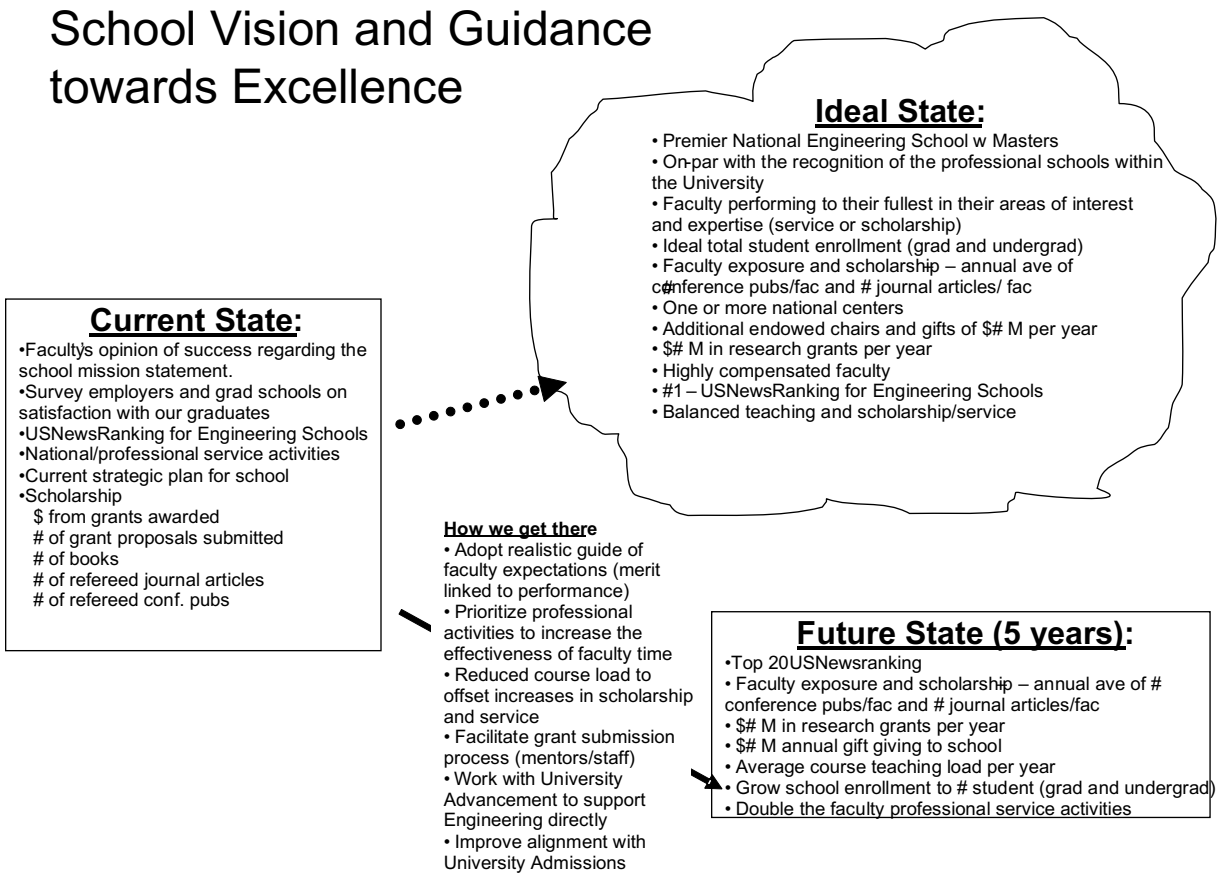
B) List other service activities with descriptions identifying your role and specific contributions to the community.

i) Department—
ii) MUSE (especially Recruiting and Retention)—
iii) University—
iv) Professional Societies—
v) Local Community—
vi) Other—

C) Describe a plan or primary focus for service during the next academic year.

Evaluator response to proposed plan:

APPENDIX C


School Vision and Guidance towards Excellence
Ideal State:
• Premier National Engineering School w Masters
• On-par with the recognition of the professional schools within the University
• Faculty performing to their fullest in their areas of interest and expertise (service or scholarship)
• Ideal total student enrollment (grad and undergrad)
• Faculty exposure and scholarship – annual ave of conference pubs/fac and # journal articles/ fac
• One or more national centers
• Additional endowed chairs and gifts of $# M per year
• $# M in research grants per year
• Highly compensated faculty
• #1 – USNewsRanking for Engineering Schools
• Balanced teaching and scholarship/service
Current State:
•Faculty's opinion of success regarding the school mission statement.
•Survey employers and grad schools on satisfaction with our graduates
•USNewsRanking for Engineering Schools
•National/professional service activities
•Current strategic plan for school
•Scholarship
$ from grants awarded
# of grant proposals submitted
# of books
# of refereed journal articles
# of refereed conf. pubs
How we get there
• Adopt realistic guide of faculty expectations (merit linked to performance)
• Prioritize professional activities to increase the effectiveness of faculty time
• Reduced course load to offset increases in scholarship and service
• Facilitate grant submission process (mentors/staff)
• Work with University Advancement to support Engineering directly
• Improve alignment with University Admissions
Future State (5 years):
•Top 20USNewsranking
• Faculty exposure and scholarship – annual ave of # conference pubs/fac and # journal articles/fac
• $# M in research grants per year
• $# M annual gift giving to school
• Average course teaching load per year
• Grow school enrollment to # student (grad and undergrad)
• Double the faculty professional service activities

APPENDIX D

MUSE Faculty Performance Evaluation

Faculty Member Name: _____ Academic Rank: _____Date: _____

Department:_____

Category	Continuous problems in area of evaluation, no evidence of effort to improve 1	Meets minimal expectations, has occasional problems, no effort to improve 2	Meets minimal expectations, solid performance in certain areas, effort to improve 3	Fulfills required duties well, shows overall excellence in some areas, continuous improvement 4	Exceptional performance of required duties, expertise and leadership in area of evaluation 5	Not applicable or no basis for judgment NA
I)Teaching Effectiveness (add specific areas/topics)						
2) Scholarship and Technical Competency (“)						
4) Service (“)						
Summary Evaluation						

Evaluator’s Comments:

Evaluator’s Name: _____Position: _____ Date : _____

Evaluator’s Signature: _____

Faculty Member’s Comments:

Faculty Member’s Acknowledgment of Discussion of Review: Signature: _____
Date: _____