Report of the
Boulder Faculty Assembly Administrator Appraisal Committee
Concerning
Robert Davis, Dean of the College of Engineering and Applied Science

Spring, 2012

SURVEY DESIGN

The Administrator Appraisal Program (AAP) seeks to provide in-depth feedback with a high rate of faculty response, to assure a representative survey. Faculty has the opportunity to provide AAP feedback to the review/reappointment process when the president, chancellor, provost, or the dean of their school or college is undergoing the third- or fifth-year review. Faculty are also requested to complete and return a “BFA Satisfaction Survey” addressing campus-wide concerns such as salary and benefit programs. With regard to the appraisal of administrators, the questionnaire contains items addressing the effectiveness of each administrator’s performance in key areas. Fifteen items--addressing general administrative style, salary process, and meeting diversity goals--are common for all administrators. The remaining questions are performance-based and tailored to the specific circumstances of the administrator being reviewed and his/her school or college. Faculty members respond to the items using a 5–point effectiveness scale, in which 1 = very ineffective, 2 = ineffective, 3 = neither effective nor ineffective, 4 = effective, and 5 = very effective, plus a "Don't Know/Not applicable" option. In addition, space is provided for faculty members to write open-ended comments.

The evaluation process of Dean Davis was designed to take into account different levels of faculty interaction with the dean. Some faculty members and administrators have regular contact with the dean and therefore have an intimate knowledge about many aspects of his performance. Other faculty, having less frequent contact with the dean, may be less well informed about these issues.

To address the problem of different levels of familiarity with the dean’s performance, the AAP Committee1 sent the questionnaire to all College of Engineering and Applied Science faculty designated as eligible by the BFA (the population of interest), as well as a subsample of faculty especially likely to be knowledgeable about Dean Davis’s role as dean (“knowledgeable sample”). The latter group was constructed in consultation with Dean Davis and includes faculty members from colleges/schools other than engineering.

SURVEY PARTICIPATION

The AAP Committee and Boulder Faculty Assembly have agreed, on the advice of faculty who specialize in survey methods, that a 60% return rate is needed for a representative statistical study. The knowledgeable subsample met this requirement, with

1 Sanjai Bhagat (Chair), Arturo Aldama, Tom Blumenthal, Andrew Cooperstock, Ruth Covington, Judith Packer Jesudason, Henry Kapteyn, Page Moreau, Charles Rogers, Daniel Sher, Elizabeth Skewes.
an 88% response rate (15 responses from 17 faculty surveyed) and the entire population sample met this requirement with a 60% response rate (167 respondents from 277 faculty surveyed).

AIMS OF THE AAP EVALUATION

The AAP Committee seeks to provide a developmental picture of strengths and weaknesses for administrators standing for review or reappointment in AY 2011-2012. Broadly viewed, we considered four general categories in evaluating responses regarding Dean Davis:

**Strengths to Build On** represent items rated as effective or very effective by a substantial majority of the faculty (60% or higher giving a rating of 4 or 5).

**Assets to Protect** are items where at least half of the responding faculty found the dean’s performance to be better than effective (50% - 59% of respondents gave ratings of 4 or 5). Thus, any reallocation of effort to correct weaknesses or changes in priorities should try to protect these strengths.

**Issues to be Mindful Of** are items judged to be effective or better by the majority of the respondents, but less than effective by a significant minority of respondents (25% - 39% ratings of 1 or 2).

**Areas that Need Improvement** are items judged by a significant fraction of the faculty as unsatisfactory (40% or more 1 or 2 ratings).

OVERVIEW

**Strengths to Build On (60% or more ratings of 4 or 5)**

The committee defined these to be areas in which 60% or more of the respondents gave ratings of 4 or 5. The dean received ratings in this category on 19 of the 21 questions in the knowledgeable sample. These strengths are:

- Supporting consistently high-quality research
- Supporting consistently high-quality service
- Making decisions in a timely fashion
- Being receptive to concerns of faculty
- Being receptive to concerns of staff
- Being receptive to concerns of students
- Constructively managing conflicts among faculty
- Constructively managing conflicts among staff
- Treating faculty of all ranks in a fair way
- Appropriately involving faculty in decisions
- Acting with integrity
• Fostering equitable salary system
• Making progress towards diversity goals
• Overseeing faculty personnel matters
• Providing for faculty development/support
• Providing effective leadership for the College
• Promoting research including matching funds, etc.
• Promoting educational excellence/learning experience
• Overseeing the college budget

According to the population sample responses, there were nine areas that received more than 60% of ratings of 4 or 5 and qualify as strengths to build on:

• Supporting consistently high-quality research
• Making decisions in a timely fashion
• Acting with integrity
• Making progress towards diversity goals
• Overseeing faculty personnel matters
• Providing for faculty development/support
• Promoting research including matching funds, etc.
• Promoting educational excellence/learning experience
• Overseeing the college budget

Assets to Protect (50 - 59% of ratings of 4 or 5)

The remaining two areas fell into the category of assets to protect in the knowledgeable sample. These were:

• Supporting high-quality teaching
• Creating an atmosphere of trust

In the population sample, there were five areas that can be grouped as assets to protect:

• Being receptive to concerns of faculty
• Being receptive to concerns of staff
• Being receptive to concerns of students
• Treating faculty of all ranks in a fair way
• Providing effective leadership for the College

Issues to be Mindful Of (25- 39% of ratings of 1 or 2)
In the knowledgeable group responses, no area fell in this category. However, in the population sample, five items received 25 - 39% ratings of 1 or 2:

- Supporting consistently high-quality teaching
- Creating an atmosphere of trust
- Treating faculty of all ranks in a fair way
- Appropriately involving faculty in decisions
- Fostering equitable/merit-based salary system

Areas In Need of Improvement (40% or more ratings of 1 or 2)

No items fell in this category for the knowledgeable group or the population.

OPEN-ENDED COMMENTS

In addition to responding to the 21 items included on the questionnaire, respondents were given the opportunity to provide open-ended comments regarding Dean Davis. The ratio of positive to negative comments was inconsistent with the numerical ratings given to Dean Davis, which were positive overall.

In the comments that related specifically to Dean Davis’ performance, there were 16 positive comments, 27 negative comments, 11 comments that were mixed, and 5 comments that stated the raters had insufficient familiarity with the situation to make a judgment (here, we counted different comments made by the same individual respondent in Q8 and Q12 as separate comments). In the comments that had to do with Campus-wide satisfaction, many had to do directly with issues determined by Dean Davis (e.g. overreliance on FCQs when judging teaching), and here there were 2 positive comments and 14 negative comments.

The positive comments in the survey remarked on Dean Davis’ deft handling of the budget in this era of diminished resources (n=6), his establishment of high standards for research in the College (n=3), his work ethic, overall management skills, and trustworthiness (n=6). A few representative positive comments are “Overall Dean Davis has done a very good job. His strength is in knowing the details and establishing high standards for teaching and research”, “Dean Davis does an excellent job of creating an atmosphere of trust with his faculty” and “Rob is a highly credible, honest, hard-working fair Dean and his service and leadership to the College are very much appreciated.”

Negative comments noted Dean Davis’ over-reliance on numbers and simple metrics when evaluating research (n=13), his lack of appreciation of excellence in teaching and reliance only on FCQ’s when judging teaching (n=14), an apparent favoritism towards his home department (n=7), and a lack of personal skills in dealing with faculty and potential donors, and/or reliance on Assistant or Associate Deans to communicate with faculty (n=7). Here, if the same comment listed several different issues of concern, we counted both issues. Several
representative negative comments are: “Unfortunately his approach is based largely on money and numbers, rather than more qualitative factors”, “The Dean overemphasizes simplistic quantitative measures, especially grant support, in making resource and personnel decisions”, “This reviewer believes too much weight is given to the numerical results of the student evaluations. The same is true for research dollars and number of Ph.D. students per faculty”, “There is a pervasive belief across many departments of a bias toward Dean’s (sic) home department” and “Our Dean manages by spreadsheet, and the most important thing on that sheet is research dollars…”

BFA SATISFACTION SURVEY RESULTS

The BFA also asked the respondents in the College of Engineering and Applied Science to complete a satisfaction survey which asked 20 questions about the general level of university support. The items are identified with respect to the four categories previously identified: (a) strengths to build on (60% or more ratings of 4 and 5), (b) assets to protect (50-59% of ratings of 4 and 5), (c) issues to be mindful of (25-39% of ratings of 1 and 2), and (d) areas that need improvement (40% or more ratings of 1 and 2).

The knowledgeable group rated nine of the twenty satisfaction items as “a strength to build on,” as did the population for three of the twenty satisfaction items. Both groups rated the following three items highly (“strengths to build on”):

- Teaching responsibilities
- Relationships with colleagues
- Library access to outside resources

The knowledgeable group rated two of the twenty satisfaction items as “assets to protect.” These items are:

- University efforts to retain a diverse undergraduate student body
- Retirement benefits

The population rated five of the twenty satisfaction items as “assets to protect.” These items are:

- Education and training support offered by CU Libraries’ staff in new information technology
- Technological support in teaching
- Retirement benefits
- Departmental support services
- Support and encouragement you receive from the University for your research

The knowledgeable group rated two of the twenty satisfaction items as “areas that need improvement.” These items are:

- Evaluation of teaching
- Space and facilities

The population group rated one of the twenty satisfaction items as “areas that need improvement.” This item is: Number of graduate students assisting in teaching
RECOMMENDATIONS

The Engineering Dean’s emphasis on quantitative performance metrics can be an effective means of identifying excellence within the College of Engineering and Applied Sciences (CEAS), but data are fundamentally backward looking. Thus, it is essential that the Dean accompany this approach by leading the development of a clearly articulated vision for the future of the CEAS. In the absence of such a vision, the faculty can easily begin to think (and the feedback on the present review suggests that many do feel this way) that the CEAS is administered largely by formula. Many CEAS faculty express concern that creativity and the advancement of knowledge are undervalued compared with performance on metrics.

Thus, we encourage the Dean to consider leading a series of inclusive give and take discussions with the faculty, department chairs, program directors, critical associated departments and institutes, and other important constituents regarding strategic planning for the future of the college. Through such a discussion, perhaps with the help of an advisory committee, a vision of future directions of the CEAS can be developed that has broad buy-in and re-energizes the faculty. An effective plan goes beyond contemporary research-du-jour buzzwords, or simply responding to the faculty members who promote themselves the best. The Dean should seek to understand in-depth the research enterprise that is CEAS, and where the college is best positioned to change the world. Questions that could be addressed include:

- By consensus, which fields within CEAS are particularly successful now? Quantitative metrics can be quite useful (i.e. the faculty who are working hard and making an impact in their fields, but perhaps don’t find time for internal P.R.). However, these metrics must go well beyond simply counting papers and grant dollars. What are the critical resources needed for these fields to move to the next level of impact and international importance?
- By consensus, which are the most important missing fields within the college and/or the departments? These fields can have few or even no vocal supporters in a zero-sum environment. However, the visionary support and growth of such areas can be critical in assuring the future impact of the college and of CU-Boulder as a whole. What resources would be required to become active in new areas?
- Based on this information, where can new areas be introduced into the mix that bridge areas of excellence and broaden the reputation of the college?
- What are the strengths and limitations of the present undergraduate and graduate teaching missions? What resources are likely required to bring CEAS teaching to the next level of impact? What is required to bring the college to national prominence in this important part of the mission?
- What are the unique strengths of the CEAS research enterprise as a whole at present? Several on the AAP committee believe that CU is comparatively strong in collaboration between engineering and the sciences, with particularly low barriers to collaboration between the colleges. Examples include materials science, optics and optical sciences,
space sciences, and nanotechnology, as well as new institutes such as RASEI; and centers such as the liquid crystal NSF MRSEC and NSF EUV center.

- How can CEAS encourage such collaborative and interdisciplinary efforts?
- How can it do so while also contributing the unique engineering perspective to these efforts? (simply-put, engineering is about systems more than components)
- Are there areas where areas of potential synergy have not yet been sufficiently recognized?
- Are there major infrastructure gaps that, if addressed, could leverage efforts of the faculty in a broad range of areas?

The AAP committee would like to re-emphasize that we do not believe that “data-driven” is synonymous with absence of vision. Rather, the development of a shared vision for the CEAS, a vision developed with substantial faculty input and that intelligently makes use of data to identify areas of excellence is one that can gain broad respect—and where this Dean could make a positive impact.

CONCLUSION

On a majority of the items on the administrator appraisal questionnaire, Dean Davis received a rating of either strengths to build on or assets to protect. These were the ratings of the population drawn from the College of Engineering and Applied Science faculty. The population also noted five areas as issues to be mindful of. There were no items in the areas in need of improvement category. A concern worth noting is the evaluation of faculty performance (teaching, in particular) in the College of Engineering and Applied Science. Faculty expressed concern regarding over-reliance on data and spreadsheets in evaluating faculty performance. Some faculty noted an over-reliance on FCQs in evaluating teaching; the AAP committee suggests consideration of multiple measures in evaluating teaching excellence. Also, the AAP committee suggests that greater emphasis be placed on the impact of faculty research; and less emphasis on the number of publications and research grants. If Dean Davis were to give more critical thought to how he evaluates faculty performance, this would further enhance his effectiveness as an administrator, the quality of teaching and the impact of research at the College.

Dean Davis received high ratings from the knowledgeable sample for all items included on the administrator appraisal questionnaire. There were no items in the areas in need of improvement category and no items were rated as issues of which to be mindful. All items were rated as strengths to build on or assets to protect.

It is apparent that Dean Davis is a respected Dean who has excelled in his effective management of the college resources and budgets. Overall, Dean Davis is seen as an effective administrator by faculty in most respects.