

On Collegiality as a Fourth Criterion of Evaluation

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When evaluating faculty for renewal, promotion, and tenure, the focus has customarily been on scholarship, teaching, and service. There is an increasing tendency on behalf of chairs and administrators to add collegiality as a fourth criterion of evaluation. In recent months the ISU administration has been discussing the possibility of including a statement on collegiality in faculty Position Responsibility Statements. We, as the Executive Committee of the Iowa State University chapter of the American Association of University Professors, find this worrisome and, if this comes to be, a step in the wrong direction.

Most agree that collegiality is an important aspect of a faculty member's overall performance. But care must be taken to understand collegiality in such a way that it does not infringe upon academic freedom. Collaboration and constructive cooperation should be expected when a faculty member is called upon to participate in various aspects of committee service, whether it relates to evaluation of a colleague or to the life of the institution as a whole, and, when appropriate, to research. If collegiality is understood in this way it is not a distinct criterion to be assessed independently of teaching, service, and research. It is rather an integral part of how well the faculty member executes these functions.

The AAUP document, "On Collegiality as a Criterion for Faculty Evaluation," points out the dangers of adding collegiality as a fourth criterion of evaluation.

The current tendency to isolate collegiality as a distinct dimension of evaluation, however, poses several dangers. Historically, "collegiality" has not infrequently been associated with ensuring homogeneity, and hence with practices that exclude persons on the basis of their difference from a perceived norm. The invocation of "collegiality" may also threaten academic freedom. In the heat of important decisions regarding promotion or tenure, as well as other matters involving such traditional areas of faculty responsibility as curriculum or academic hiring, collegiality may be confused with the expectation that a faculty member display "enthusiasm" or "dedication," evince "a constructive attitude" that will "foster harmony," or display an excessive deference to administrative or faculty decisions where these may require reasoned discussion. Such expectations are flatly contrary to elementary principles of academic freedom, which protect a faculty member's right to dissent from the judgments of colleagues and administrators.

The understanding of collegiality as a call for uniformity and agreement holds the potential of chilling faculty debate and discussion. As observed in the AAUP document, "Criticism and opposition do not necessarily conflict with collegiality. Gadflies, critics of institutional practices or collegial norms, even the occasional malcontent, have all been known to play an invaluable and constructive role in the life of academic departments and institutions. They have sometimes proved collegial in the deepest and truest sense."

ISU has relatively clear definitions of the three areas in which faculty are evaluated. Collegiality, when appropriately understood, enhances faculty performance in all areas. If added as a separate criterion it will in all likelihood invite an understanding that collegiality consists of agreement and uniformity, and as such will have chilling effects on academic freedom.