

FASC Overview of Faculty Evaluations, 1989

As Weber pointed out, cultures, societies and institutions tend to produce and variously work within and on what he called "ideal types." These 'types' are not necessarily "ideal" in the sense of being "the best" but, rather, express a kind of qualitative norm that is emblematic for the people in the group. As we read the materials presented to us this year, we realized that we were encountering expressions of something like such an ideal type for a UGS faculty member.

This, then, is a composite picture of frequently mentioned qualities and activities that are praised, and which are also, when absent, remarked on in a tone of disappointment, implying that there are particular sorts of expectations to which UGS faculty members are held by those with whom we work, whether as learners or as colleagues.

UGS faculty members are both supportive and challenging in ways appropriate to each individual, revealing very special abilities to be attentive to the needs, strengths, interests, and situation of each person. It is noted when we fail in supportiveness or in challenging someone to do excellent work, as it is when we are "not available." Being "unavailable" (one of the more common criticisms) sometimes seems to mean that we are hard to reach by phone or letter, but sometimes it means that we are indeed there but are not adequately responsive.

Some learners like it when we give them very concrete guidance on how to proceed, but only when they feel that the guidance is what they, individually, need. We are criticized for "imposing" ways of working on people in ways that do not reflect the ideal of sensitively individualized guidance.

Concrete, specific comments are appreciated, although "picky" and highly prescriptive "corrections" are not. The warmest gratitude seems to be felt when we succeed in speaking directly to the intentions of the learner (especially when the learner has lost sight of them).

We differ as to whether or not we return materials sent to us quickly enough; it is considered important that we do so, and we are criticized when we take too long (more than a couple of weeks). Taking too long tends to be interpreted as an expression of lack of interest and personal support (rather than, say, lack of organization).

Our work in colloquia is praised most highly when we manage to provide lots of information and a clear and appropriate schedule while at the same time responding to the individual questions of participants and being able to be highly flexible about plans (without "wasting" too much time on such decisions). There is an ideal here of structure and information as providing a kind of initiation to a safe place, one that is constant and coherent enough to allow differences to be expressed and appreciated. Too much and too little structure are both criticized.

We are more often praised for our ability to ask good questions than for providing good answers or even sources in which to find answers.

It is considered good if we can work with our colleagues in ways that respect our differences but minimize friction. Learners comment on how we work together in colloquia and seminars, and seem to appreciate very much having "two very different personalities, fields, styles" working well together. They also note similarities favorably, but do so with less enthusiasm.

Concern was sometimes expressed over our ability to help learner committee members work well together. When the committees had not met yet, some learners expressed anxious hopes that we would fill that role.

Our colleagues expect us to work well and smoothly with them on faculty governance and are very appreciative of creative solutions, hard work, willingness to take on tasks.

It is clearly important that we be "intellectually active," whether or not that activity is expressed in publications. It is particularly admired when our UGS work, intellectual engagements, and activism complement and enrich each other.

A lack of clear indication of interdisciplinary interests and efforts is noted as a problem, as such work is praised when it is evidenced.

We ourselves and our learners consider work we do beyond direct UGS responsibilities very important in terms of its value to our communities (professional and other) and to its enhancement of the reputation (and hence also appeal and legitimacy) of The Union. Perhaps because of the kinds of questions asked on the forms, we rarely comment on such work on the part of our colleagues. Colleagues seem to note the activity or lack of it of colleagues within The Union more than outside of it.

We are complimented if we know how to mark beginnings and endings of group work.

We are severely criticised if we appear to try to dominate -- individuals, groups, meetings, anything.

It is noted if we do not write well.

We are expected to make the value and quality of UGS education evident ourselves, and it is noted if/when something we do is not consonant with what are understood to be UGS values. We are highly praised for exemplifying the particular commitments of the graduate school.

None of this will be at all surprising, of course, but since we could not spell it all out in each letter, we thought you might like to see it, even in this preliminary form, as it provides something of a context for our self evaluations and comments on the work of others.