

## On Evaluation at the University of the South

This document, whose goal is to state the goals, methods and scope of evaluation within the University of the South, has been prepared by a sub-committee of the University Strategic Planning Committee, and it has been properly evaluated.<sup>1</sup>

Scope of Evaluation: Everything and Everyone is to be evaluated regularly.

1) Exceptions: There are NO exceptions, except for Governing Boards, college faculty meetings, and the Office of Evaluation. Theoretically, of course, all things and actions should be properly evaluated. The exceptions explain themselves as follows: a) Governing Boards: These consist, of course, of rich and powerful people, many of them especially appointed by God; they may not be real reverend, but they are right reverend. In addition, they control the University's purse. For the general problem, see below under "evaluating the rich and powerful student: admission and grading;" b) on the sworn statement of the Dean of the College and Secretary of the Faculty that nothing whatever occurs in Faculty Meetings, and their course is too chaotic for evaluation, they have been excepted; c) Office of Evaluation: in 1995, when this report was commissioned, it was already clear that evaluation was among the things to be evaluated, as the SACS self-study included a Committee on Evaluation, and a government agency was already considering an evaluation of evaluating agencies like SACS. It soon became clear that proper evaluation involved an infinite regress: all evaluations must be evaluated. Here in Sewanee we have resolved this threat by inventing The Office of Evaluation, always headed by a former employee of Rhodes College (or, at worst, someone who has lived in Memphis), which is the final authority, and which is NEVER evaluated.

2) Avoiding Infinite Regress: How does the process work? Let us say it is time for the regular evaluation of the College Committee on Committees. This committee meets to recommend faculty members for membership on College Committees. The Evaluation Committee for the Committee on Committees (E. C. f. t. C. o. C.) attends the meeting, then withdraws to evaluate the Committee's action. Their report goes to the Meta-Committee for the Evaluation of Evaluation Committees, which evaluates their evaluation and submits its report to the Office of Evaluation, which evaluates it and submits a report to the Vice-Chancellor. It

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<sup>1</sup>See attached the Evaluation of this report prepared by an Ad Hoc Evaluation Committee appointed by the Vice-Chancellor; the members were Bill Barry, Bill Clarkson, Billy the singing janitor, and R. R. William Crescenzo.



is hoped that all behavior within the University, other than evaluation, will be halted by the year A.D.2000.<sup>2</sup>

3) Up, Down, Sideways, and Inside Out: While evaluation by immediate superiors (down) and by colleagues (sideways) have been common, The University of the South requires *complete* evaluations, i. e., to include evaluation by inferiors (up) and self-evaluation (inside out). In the evaluation of a faculty member in the College, for example, the four evaluations are done (a) by the Dean, (b) by the department, with the addition of relevant faculty in other departments, (c) by the students, and (d) by the faculty member her(him)self. Inanimate objects are currently excepted from the requirement of self-evaluation, and most administrators are excepted from the likely embarrassment of evaluation from below.

#### Goals of Evaluation:

- 1) The primary goal of evaluation is to evaluate.<sup>3</sup>
- 2) The secondary goal of evaluation is to consume the time of the evaluators and evaluatees.<sup>4</sup>
- 3) The tertiary goal of evaluation is to effect change.<sup>5</sup>

#### Methods of Evaluation:

1) Who shall do it? There are two groups best qualified to evaluate anything: those who know something about it and those who don't. The immediate (and naive) impulse in appointing evaluators is to choose those who know something about the thing or person being evaluated. The difficulty with this procedure is that such persons come to their task with assumptions and

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<sup>2</sup>On a cautionary note, see the visionary article "Meta-Life in the Third Millenium," by Alvin Toffler, in *Fantasy and Science Fiction* (August, 1953).

<sup>3</sup>The old-fashioned view that the primary purpose of evaluation was something-or-other other than itself has been conclusively rejected by the Presidents of the Associated Colleges of the South ; see "Evaluating evaluating," (*ACS Newsletter*, 1995).

<sup>4</sup> The description of this function as "keeping everybody off of the streets" is an unfortunate misunderstanding; see the recent University document "Winter Storm Emergency."

<sup>5</sup>This need not be positive change. The guiding principle is that the change should be in conformity with behavior at the "Regent's List of 34 Fairly Awful Small Colleges." It is hoped (see above) as we fulfill the first and second goals, that the third will "wither away."



specific knowledge which tend to prejudice judgement. Let us say Professor X of Department Y is to evaluate his colleague, Professor Z. Professor X has known Professor Z for some time and considers him a dangerous fruitcake. Obviously, Professor X's evaluation is likely to describe Professor Z as an effective teacher, profound scholar, and worthy member of our caring community.

To avoid such biased evaluations, one's second impulse is to turn to the ignorant as evaluators: Professor Z would be evaluated by the head of Physical Plant Services, a colleague in the Forestry Department, and a designated member of the New York Rangers. The difficulty here, aside from the expense of bringing in outside evaluators, is that the evaluation may be questioned by the committee evaluating it. For example, in the recent case of Professor Z-prime, a member of the Department of Rhetorical Services, the committee evaluating his evaluation<sup>6</sup> took exception to the description of him as "quite an attractive ornamental shrub, with a subtle scent of fruitcake."

We are proud to point out that the Sewanee Office of Evaluation led the nation in developing the new paradigm for choosing evaluators, the use of those who, while knowing nothing about the subject, have some natural and meaningful relationship to him(it/her); hence, for example, the evaluators of this report all have the mystic affinity with its author which is due to having the same first name. In other cases, evaluators have been chosen by their times of birth, street numbers, sexual orientations, and blood types.

2) How shall it be done? This is an easy one. The rule is, that the evaluators shall spend time with that which is being evaluated, decide how they feel about her(him/it), and write a report.

3) What shall be in the report? The Office of Evaluation has determined that the report shall have a beginning, a middle and an end.<sup>7</sup> The beginning shall summarize what the report will say, the middle shall state in detail what the report says, and the end shall summarize what the report said. Only in the case of the evaluation of Professors of Literature, the beginning shall be an irrelevant quotation in a foreign language and the end shall bear no relation to what the middle seemed to be saying.

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<sup>6</sup>This committee was made up entirely of undergraduates who thought Professor Z-prime was "really cute."

<sup>7</sup>See Anonymous Bosch, "Evaluating Aristotelianism in Academic Evaluation" (*Chronicle of Highest Education*, 1899).



Conclusion: This report has evaluated the scope, goals and methods of evaluation at the University of the South, and, of course, found them good.

#### Appendix: Evaluation of This Evaluation

The evaluation committee, consisting of Bill Barry (chair), Bill Clarkson, Billy the singing janitor, and R. R. William Crescenzo, voted 2 to 1 (chair absent) that the report was "okay." Their evaluation is currently under consideration by the Meta-Committee on Evaluation.

##### Sample Statements of Committee Members:

Mr. Barry: "I really have more important things to do."<sup>8</sup>

Mr. Clarkson: "Professor Bonds is obviously an effective teacher, profound scholar, and worthy member of our caring community."

Mr. Crescenzo: "I liked him when he had those old, broken-down cars, but he has clearly gone uptown."

Billy: "I like him; hell, I like everybody."

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<sup>8</sup>Mr. Barry is currently on administrative leave while under investigation (evaluation) by the Office of Evaluation.