

Academic Vital Signs

Aligning Departmental Evaluation with Institutional Goals

The faculty leaders and department chairs in academic departments make many financially and strategically important decisions for institutions of higher education. Unfortunately, the data and goals used to make those decisions rarely align with institutional strategic goals, preventing progress on five critical priorities: cost efficiency, enrollment growth, student outcomes, scholarship, and faculty diversity and inclusion. This infographic provides a quick-reference guide for how to translate these institutional priorities into departmental performance indicators and goals. It also provides guiding principles for designing a new annual departmental evaluation and planning process that sustains momentum beyond the initial review of the departmental performance indicators.

Cost Efficiency

As traditional funding sources become less reliable, institutions must identify opportunities to maximize their existing instructional capacity without overburdening faculty or sacrificing academic rigor

- Instructional capacity gap**
Use the difference between the number of sections a department could teach compared to the number they do teach to inform faculty line and adjunct allocation as well as course offerings
- Student credit hours per faculty FTE**
Complement average faculty workload metrics with an analysis of student credit hours taught per full-time-equivalent faculty member to more closely align instructional resources with student demand
- Course release targets**
Set a budget for course releases as a percentage of faculty workload to help manage instructional costs while providing faculty with needed time to conduct research and administrative responsibilities

Enrollment Growth

As institutions become more tuition-dependent, department leaders and faculty must ensure that their programs attract students and maintain demand in the workforce

- Major migration**
Conduct an analysis of student flows in and out of each major to identify potential opportunities for collaboration or a need for additional student engagement
- Off-peak enrollment**
Measure the number of credit hours generated in summer and winter sessions and provide incentives to increase these numbers, reduce time to degree, and generate revenue
- External demand**
Evaluate the external market demand for each program and the skills it teaches to ensure curricula are up to date and degrees remain in high demand

Student Outcomes

Departments and their faculty must support student success before and after graduation by removing curricular barriers to completion and engaging students in high-impact practices

- D, F, withdrawal rates**
Identify success rates in critical first-year or introductory courses, especially those with multiple sections, to identify opportunities for course redesigns that can improve student success
- Junior graduation rate**
Replace unfair and imprecise departmental four- or six-year graduation rates with a calculation of time to degree and graduation rate for students after they have earned 60 credits
- Experiential learning**
Calculate the percentage of students in each major who participate in high-quality experiential learning to help departments understand how to contribute to postgraduate success

Scholarship

To advance institutional and disciplinary scholarly and research goals, academic departments must provide faculty guidance on valued outputs as well as progress toward tenure and promotion

- Holistic outputs**
Track a wider array of scholarly and research activities beyond grants and publications to recognize disciplinary differences
- Effort metrics**
Use leading indicators of research outputs, such as publication acceptance rate, to help identify challenges to increasing research activity and opportunities to invest in research support
- Post-tenure promotion**
Provide clear incentives for outstanding performance beyond tenure to prevent associate-level faculty from stalling before promotion and to motivate engagement in scholarly activity throughout their careers

Faculty Diversity & Inclusion

To make progress on faculty diversity and inclusion, departments must analyze problems within specific stages of the hiring pipeline as well as disparities in career advancement for historically underrepresented faculty

- Pipeline stage conversion rates**
To help guide search and interview process improvement, identify the specific stage of the hiring pipeline at which diverse candidates typically fall out
- Retention and advancement disparities**
Track time to tenure and promotion rates by race, ethnicity, and gender to identify possible disparities throughout the faculty lifecycle

INSTITUTIONAL PRIORITY

KEY DEPARTMENTAL ANALYSES

Six Principles of Departmental Evaluation

- 1** Conduct annual strategic reviews for each department to encourage continuous improvement
- 2** Reduce the self-reporting burden on departments by redirecting institutional research time to curate a standard set of departmental data
- 3** Make departmental performance data transparent and available to all faculty leaders
- 4** Allocate discretionary resources based on performance against departmental goals
- 5** Use departmental performance indicators when making long-term resource decisions such as space allocation or faculty line allocation
- 6** Select two to four key goals and corresponding action steps for each department during the annual strategic review