"The Case of the Unevaluated Online Courses"*

By Thomas J. Tobin, Ph.D., MSLS, PMP

The story you are about to hear is true. Only the names have been changed to protect the innocent. This is the city. I work here. I'm a faculty developer. My name is Thursday, Joe Thursday.

It was a Friday. It was raining. I was writing up reports when the provost, Julie Wednesday, came into my office. She looked agitated. She started asking questions.

"What's this about five of our faculty members not having evaluations for their promotion and tenure reviews? Don't we require that these reviews take place?"

I responded, "All we know are the facts, ma'am," and I told her what I knew.

The five faculty members in question were the most innovative on our campus. They had flipped their classrooms, adopted universal design for learning, and now were teaching fully online to reach our adult students with family and work commitments. Their students loved being able to work on courses when they could fit them into their hectic schedules. That's life in the big city.

The five faculty members were putting together their tenure portfolios, with the usual lineup of artifacts: publications, committee work, and service letters from colleagues.

So, what was wrong? A lack of credible witnesses to their online teaching.

I talked to some students of the five faculty members, but they couldn't really evaluate online teaching. Sure, the students rated how much interaction took place, and they said whether they were satisfied with the instructors' communication skills, but they weren't yet experts in the field. I took their statements: the five faculty members had plenty of student-ratings data. But data only from students wouldn't hold up under cross-examination.

I had to get to the people who were really responsible and find out why these online courses hadn't been evaluated. Could it be coincidence, or something more sinister? The process for evaluating teaching was tried and, maybe, true. A department chairperson would sit in the back of a classroom for an hour and then evaluate what he or she had witnessed. In this case, though, the trail had gone cold.

I went to see the department chair, Mickey Tuesday, to get some answers. We go way back, to our service together at a community college.

I walked into Mickey's office and closed the door. "I'll lay it right on the line, Mickey," I said. "There are five faculty members whose online courses haven't been evaluated. What's the story?"

Mickey leaned back in his chair, smiled quietly, and said, "You know, Thursday, it's a simple case. I've never taught an online course myself. I know I'm supposed to observe everybody teaching, but I wouldn't even know what I was looking at in an online course. So I observed those faculty members' face-to-face courses instead.

Open and shut, right?"

Maybe Mickey was right. Maybe it was that simple. I returned to my office. On Monday, I told Wednesday what Tuesday had told me on Friday. After she had heard the story, the provost said, "Thursday, can't we just show people what to look for in good online teaching?"

She was right. Many campus leaders have never taught online. I could foresee the day when this would be different, but for now, the provost had a point. Department chairs and deans might not have taught online, but they grew up on instant orange juice. Flip a dial—instant entertainment. Press seven digits—instant communication. Turn a key and push a pedal—instant transportation. Flash a card—instant money. Shove in a problem and push a few buttons—

In This Issue

Optimizing Performance: Three Essentials for Success

By R. Kent Crookston, Ph.D.

In a recent national survey, nearly 3,000 American academic leaders identified problem behavior of employees as their top concern. Lackluster performance was the most common problem; bullying and being passive-aggressive were less common but the most troubling. Most of us have worked with a person whose conduct disrupts or interferes with the performance and productivity of others, sometimes of the entire department. Confronting a problem performer with confidence and optimizing their performance are what this article is about.

My colleague David Whetten, a professor of organizational behavior, spent 40 years at two universities and consulted with numerous business organizations, researching factors that influence behavior and performance. David developed what he calls a "performance equation." He has given me permission to share his equation and to discuss its application.

Performance = Expectations x Ability x Motivation

This equation asserts that people's optimal performance is dependent on knowing what is expected of them and whether they are able and motivated to deliver. Note the mathematical construction of the equation, which makes all the elements indispensable. If any one component is zero, productivity is zero. In my years of interacting with academic leaders, I have found Dave's equation to be a very straightforward and effective way to diagnose the root of poor performance, and also a very helpful reference when interacting with the poor performer.

Expectations

"Expectations are the deal breaker," Whetten says. "If there is ambiguity around expectations, people will undergo performance stress of the worst kind." Unless performance standards and measures have been clarified and agreed upon, having a meeting to discuss unacceptable performance can be awkward and stressful for both the supervisor and the employee.

It is most helpful when all members of a department have taken time to identify what guides and inspires them, as well as the productivity and etiquette they expect of one another. These expectations should be approved by the entire unit, and revisited frequently. It is then relatively easy for an administrator to confront an individual's performance that is deviant, and ask him or her to discuss the gap between his or her behavior and the unit's well-known norms. It is, of course, appropriate to consider what is specifically expected of each person in his or her unique role within the unit, and whether there is any reason the basic standards might not apply to that person, or might need to be customized for an individual's situation.

Ability

Once expectations have been clarified, it is important to determine whether the individual has the essential skills and wherewithal to do the job. A common error is for a supervisor to confuse ability with motivation. With technological innovations in high-turnover fields of knowledge—including frequently updated systems to access that knowledge—it is becoming increasingly common for older and even midcareer professionals to find

instant answers. By establishing a few facts, we can make expert witnesses out of any colleague who observes online teaching.

Fact 1. Know what is admissible as evidence

Many face-to-face teaching practices may not be "teaching behaviors" online. In face-to-face courses, lecturing is a teaching practice. Lecture notes would not be considered in an observation of online teaching—especially if the person who developed the materials is not the person teaching the course. Videos, podcasts, and the like are also course materials and do not "count" as observable teaching behaviors.

However, if an instructor responds to student questions by posting a mini lecture or video to explain a concept, that "counts" as an observed teaching behavior—the content is created or shared as a result of interaction between learners and the instructor. The criterion to apply is one of information presentation versus interaction. Identify elements of online courses

- that are always counted as teaching practices (e.g., discussion forums, group-work areas, and feedback on student assignments);
- that may be counted as teaching practices, depending on structure and interactivity (e.g., supplemental materials, spontaneous "mini lectures," news/announcement items); and
- that are never counted as teaching practices (e.g., pre-constructed lecture content, graded tests/quizzes, major course assignments, links to websites, and content created by third parties such as textbook publishers).

Fact 2. Determine the communication between observer and observed

For online courses, an observer must notify the instructor that observation will take place. The instructor may communicate ahead of time about where the observer may wish to focus attention or about anything unique regarding the context of the instruction, especially if there are interactive elements in the online course environment that go beyond the usual places where interaction occurs.

Communication, in the form of clarifying and directional questions, is often beneficial during the online observation period. For example, an observer may want to see supplemental content that is released to students only after they accomplish various course tasks (and that the observer is unable to unlock).

Fact 3. Define who can help an observer

Observers of online courses may not be skilled at navigating the environment or may need technical help in observing online-course elements. Determine where technical assistants should come from (e.g., teaching and learning center staff). Assistants must draw a "bright line" about being able to answer process-related questions, leaving the domain of "what to observe" squarely in the hands of the administrative observers. Define the role of assistants, too. The continuum ranges from

- fully embedded (the assistant is at the keyboard all the time) to
- consultative (the observer is at the computer, and the assistant offers verbal help) to
- on call (the assistant is not initially involved and is brought in only by request).

After all these facts came to light, I visited Provost Wednesday on Monday. It can be awkward having a visit from a faculty developer. When I stopped by last week unannounced, the temperature dropped 20 degrees. This was a much warmer conversation. With a little help, Mickey observed and evaluated those five faculty members' online courses, just in time for their promotion packets to be submitted. We had the evidence we needed. Case closed.

*With apologies to the producers and writers of the Dragnet television series.

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Tom Tobin will deliver a Magna Online Seminar, "The Academic Leader's Toolkit for Evaluating Online Teaching," on December 2, 2015. Register at www.magnapubs.com.▼

themselves discouragingly behind and feeling obsolete in their own specialty. Obsolescence is, of course, embarrassing, and an employee may feel, and even portray, a lack of motivation rather than disclose his or her inadequacy. With care, a supervisor can usually find a way to determine whether an employee has the necessary knowledge and capacity to meet expectations. If some form of updating or renewal can be arranged, or if additional resources can be provided, there must be an understanding that expectations will be reevaluated once any such help has been provided.

Motivation

When supervisors in any organization are asked which of the three equation components account for poor performance, the reply is usually "lack of motivation." Whetten and I have found, however, that lack of motivation is rarely the primary cause of performance failures. Only after expectations and ability have been carefully considered and all misunderstandings around these two components removed should a leader turn to asking, "Is your heart really in this?"

Leaders must be careful when trying to evaluate another person's motivation. Motivation is sort of a black box in a person's makeup, and misdiagnosis is common. As pointed out under ability, a person may fake lack of motivation to cover a lack of ability. That said, by deploying consequences a supervisor can influence a colleague's motivation considerably. Author Kerry Patterson and colleagues, in their book, *Crucial Accountability: Tools for Resolving Violated Expectations, Broken Commitments, and Bad Behavior,* point out:

Consequences motivate. Motivation

isn't something you do to someone. People already want to do things. They're motivated by the consequences they anticipate. And since any action leads to a variety of consequences, people act on the basis of the overall consequences bundle.

Consequences are so important, in fact, that Whetten's performance equation could be rewritten this way.

Performance = Expectations x Ability x Motivation Consequences

A leader must be consistent in the application of consequences; inconsistency can create serious problems— whether a person's performance is stellar or problematic. When there are no

consequences for substandard performance, the employee will assume that no one is watching, and poor behavior can be expected to persist and even become worse. On the other hand, if positive performance is not recognized, a top performer might become discouraged and no longer be motivated to continue striving. Effective consequences are more than just talk; they are based on action—a reward given or a privilege lost.

Tina Gunsalus, director of the National Center for Professional and Research Ethics (NCPRE), has a surprising recommendation when it comes to imposing consequences. She suggests that supervisors read a book on dog training, and points out that just as with dogs, consistency with people

is essential— one should always reward good behavior and never reward bad behavior.

Confronting with confidence

Although they are not fun, confrontations comprise the core of accountability. Here are some tips:

1. Never wink at or ignore violations of expectations or protocol.
2. Start by evaluating yourself and the situation. How much is your own prejudice and lack of diligence to blame?
3. Allow people to save face; visit in private. Ask them to share their perspective about the gap between their performance and what is expected; then let them talk while you listen.

...lack of motivation is rarely the primary cause of performance failures.

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4. Be patient. If someone has been performing poorly for a long time, don't expect the person to reform overnight.

R. Kent Crookston is professor and director of academic administrative support for Brigham Young University. He is the author of Working with Problem Faculty: A Six-Step Guide for Department Chairs *(Jossey-Bass, 2012).*

R. Kent Crookston will deliver a Magna Online Seminar, "Optimizing Performance: Three Essentials for Success," on November 18, 2015. Register at www.magnapubs.com. ▼

Accreditation from a Positive Leadership Perspective

By Jeffrey L. Buller, Ph.D.

May we be candid for a moment? When academic administrators are alone—no faculty members or representatives of the press in sight—one of the things we complain about most bitterly is accreditation. It doesn't matter whether we're talking about regional accreditation of all our programs or specialized accreditation of individual programs, we find it a nuisance at best and a major waste of time and effort at worst. It's not that we don't see advantages accruing from accreditation. We do. But we find that those returns seem to be ever diminishing and certainly not worth the cost

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Accreditation can help us become more proactive with regard to an entire program, division, or institution.

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involved in the process.

Even worse, accreditation sometimes actually gets in the way of our efforts to be innovative and responsive to the needs of a new generation of students. Legislatures, governing boards, and students all want us to offer accelerated paths to an academic degree, but accrediting agencies are still mired in outdated notions such as seat time and contact hours, even as they give lip service to the importance of outcomes-based assessment and evaluation. So, if you accept a few too many AP or IB credits—or, heaven forfend, try to launch an accelerated bachelor's/master's degree program—you're likely to run into a brick wall of reasons why your creative solution (which everyone seems to like except the accreditors) "dilutes the integrity of the academic degree," simply because a graduate won't have

been physically present in a classroom as long as he or she might have been 20 or 50 years ago.

Despite all these frustrations, however, few institutions are probably going to opt out of being accredited anytime soon. Doing so means that they'd lose access to certain federal scholarship funding and decrease the likelihood that other schools will accept the credits they generate for students. They may feel too that losing certain specialized accreditation will reduce their program's attractiveness to students. (It probably won't—most prospective students don't understand or care about specialized accreditation—but the perception, not the reality, seems to be most important.) So, if accreditation is unlikely to go away, is it possible to make lemonade from this lemon and create a more positive outcome from what is by all accounts an outdated, flawed, and severely non-user-friendly process?

Cleaning house

Taking the perspective of "If we have to do it anyway, how can we make it better?" we might begin by saying that accreditation gives us a relatively rare opportunity to do some housecleaning in higher education. One widely quoted witticism that's been attributed to everyone from former governor Zell Miller of Georgia to former chancellor of the University System of Georgia Stephen Portch, the headmaster of Ohio's Lawrence School Lou Salza noted that, "It's easier to change the course of history than it is to change a history

course." Well, accreditation gives us the leverage to change history courses—and a lot more. By compelling us to make a periodic review of the curriculum, our policies and procedures, and the staffing assigned to various tasks at our schools, we have an externally imposed reason to engage in a process that can result in internally beneficial results.

For example, if we've been meaning to pare down the requirements for a program so that students have more options (and thus a greater likelihood of graduating on time), accreditation can give us an incentive for doing so. If our approval processes have become cumbersome, with the result that it can take months to pass even a minor change to the catalog or curriculum, accreditation can open the door to change. If we've allowed people to teach certain classes simply because "that's what they've always taught," even though they don't have any record of training or research in that area, accreditation allows us to move those courses to more qualified instructors, all the time saying, "I wasn't the one who wanted to do this. It was the accreditation agency that required it."

Becoming proactive

Similarly, just as we've learned to become more proactive when we conduct faculty evaluations—not merely appraising past performance but also building on the past to set goals for the future—so can accreditation help us become more proactive with regard to an entire program, division, or institution. Accreditation offers us a regular opportunity to ask ourselves where we want to go on the basis of where we've already been. It gives us a chance to plan systematically by looking at best practices at other institutions and

Stimulating Departmental Dialogue with a Pedagogy Book Club

By Randy Laist, Ph.D.

The most valuable resources in any academic department, ones that often go untapped, are the accumulated experience, insight, and ideas of the faculty. Ordinarily faculty members are so focused on the day-to-day operations of teaching their classes and fulfilling their various departmental obligations that they do not find the time or the space to cultivate a reflective attitude regarding these activities, or to share their perspectives with their colleagues. One simple way of creating a forum conducive to these kinds of exchanges is the establishment of a pedagogy book club. The accessibility and open-endedness of the book club format makes this approach an ideal strategy for encouraging faculty partici-

bers with copies of the book in return for their commitment to participate in the book club sessions. This small expenditure, therefore, became an incentive for faculty members to contribute their points of view to the common goals of stimulating dialogue and promoting a culture of reflection. The real incentive to participate, however, turned out to be the natural desire on the part of faculty members to express their own responses to the reading and to be part of a discussion about how the daily activities of our department intersect with the perspective articulated by the book's author.

The choice of book is less consequential than the committed participation of the readers. Any book can become a starting point for conversations that tend to veer away from the particular concerns raised by the text and toward

also learned from the books that were suggested, but not officially adopted, for inclusion in the book club reading list. Books are such powerful tools for thought that even simply listing titles of proposed readings provokes animated and constructive conversations.

In the same way that student engagement with reading assignments can be optimized through a skillful arrangement of pre-reading, active reading, and post-reading strategies, book club sessions tend to be the most productive when the person facilitating the meetings adopts a similar approach. Taking a few simple measures in advance of the book club sessions can help ensure an optimal engagement level among participants. One of the most important of such precautions is to ensure an adequate amount of time between the announcement of the book selection and the commencement of meetings so that everyone has time to read the book. Considering the density of many faculty members' teaching, administrative, and research obligations, it is necessary to make the book club process as low-impact as possible to ensure that commitment to participating in the book club is not perceived as prohibitively onerous. In my experience, this means granting at least a month or two for participants to read the book. Another useful strategy to employ in advance of the meetings is for the book club facilitator to provide pre-reading questions that can help direct readers' attention to critical motifs or passages from the book, encourage them to identify specific controversies or questions raised by the text and to consider personal responses to these issues, and to consider connections between observations raised in the book and ongoing topics of concern within the college or department.

> **A faculty book club can promote a departmental culture of inquiry, dialogue, and collegiality.**

pation, while the book club's focus on a single text has the capacity to bring a wide variety of diverse points of view into a single dialogue. Our department has been holding pedagogy book club meetings on a regular basis for several years now, and we have found it to be an effective way of stimulating professional inquiry and provoking conversations that are engaging, provocative, and even transformational.

The most attractive feature of the book club arrangement is its simplicity and its cost-effectiveness. Whereas professional development opportunities can often consume large portions of a departmental budget, an initial investment of a couple hundred dollars for 10 or so copies of a particular book can be sufficient to get a book club started. In our department, we provided faculty mem-

the preoccupations of the faculty themselves. These conversations can therefore provide a window into the mind-set of the faculty. Concerns that faculty might be reluctant to raise in regard to particular departmental policies can be safely expressed within the more theoretical territory of the book club conversation. The discussion about which book to read can itself be an important part of this conversation. We have read classic texts such as Paolo Friere's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, teaching memoirs such as Frank McCourt's *Teacher Man*, and books that are focused on specific teaching skills such as the composition manual *They Say, I Say* by Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein. This variety of texts has allowed our faculty to consider their own teaching practices within multiple frames of reference, but we have

As for the sessions themselves, we have typically found that two 90-minute sessions, spread out over a staggered schedule to accommodate faculty members' differing availability, are sufficient to foster a robust and in-depth discussion. Although the accessibility of online platforms makes it possible to hold these book club sessions over the Internet, the immediacy of face-to-face sessions makes it worthwhile to schedule at least some meetings in an on-ground format. One participant who is uniquely familiar with the book under discussion may volunteer to act as facilitator for these sessions, but it is also possible to organize the sessions around questions and commentary that have been prepared in advance by a number of different participants. It is important to keep in mind that the whole point of the book club arrangement is to promote dialogue, to give voice to different points of view, and to engage in open-ended conversations about professional development topics that for one reason or another do not

arise in the general course of departmental routine. The success of these sessions is not determined by how insightful or clever participants are in reading the book, but by the extent to which the book becomes a springboard for participants to voice their own perspectives regarding how the ideas in the book intersect with their classroom practice, departmental involvement, and professional self-understanding.

It is important to ensure that this conversation continues beyond the end of the final book club meeting. The book club is not an end in itself; it should be a starting point for new ideas, new approaches, and new perspectives moving forward. For this reason, it is useful to invite one of the book club participants to act as secretary, keeping a record of the various points of view expressed during the meeting. This record can be condensed into bullet points as minutes, which may provide faculty members who were not able to participate directly in the meetings with some access to the conversation that has taken place. At a future meeting, or in a post-hoc email exchange, participants might be asked to

propose plans of action that might take advantage of the insights represented by these bullet points. Conspicuous themes emerging from the book club sessions can be raised as points for discussion at future meetings, particularly salient quotations from the book can be posted in a public place to provoke responses, and faculty members can be asked to reflect on how their participation in the book club conversation has impacted their ideas about how and what they teach.

As academics, we all preach the power of literacy to shape consciousness and the capacity of books to change lives. In our daily routine, however, the importance of reading for reading's sake usually takes a back seat to more immediate concerns. Organizing a pedagogy book club is one way to incentivize faculty to use reading as an instrument of professional development while simultaneously promoting a departmental culture of inquiry, dialogue, and collegiality.

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comparing our current results with those of our peers.

Some accrediting bodies even make this proactive process part of their requirements. The Quality Enhancement Plan required for reaffirmation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools causes institutions to reflect on how they can improve student learning in a significant way that cuts across many, if not most, academic programs and produces a result that can be assessed and constantly improved. The Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools has developed an Academic Quality Improvement Process as an alternative path to accreditation that looks forward instead of backward and

seeks to instill in institutions a culture of continuous improvement.

Meeting the enemy

Finally, it's important to recognize that ultimately we're the ones who accredit each other's institutions. Although the staff members of accrediting agencies, like the career diplomats at the national level who remain in their positions even as administrations change, often seem the real roadblocks to change, it's the institutions that belong to each accrediting body that ultimately set the standards. Staff members may be very adept at telling member institutions why they can't or shouldn't cast aside obsolete standards for those that are more reflective of the academy today, but we're the ones who actually vote to approve, change, or reject standards. Maybe we've met the enemy—and it's us. If some of us who

feel hampered by the antiquated standards and processes in use at accrediting agencies were a little more outspoken at meetings about why accreditation often hurts more than it helps us, maybe we can begin to initiate some change. If we're not successful, at least we'd be no worse off than we are right now.

Okay. We've been candid enough. It's safe to let the faculty and press back into the room now.

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Understanding Issues Surrounding Work Visas

By Jennifer Patterson Lorenzetti

Many institutions of higher education use federal H-1B visas to help bring trained professionals to the institution to work in specialized fields. Yet even when these professionals are legally eligible to work in the U.S., the proper paperwork must be completed to ensure that both the professional and the institution are in compliance.

"There are many requirements that employers must be made aware of when hiring professionals, including several required filings, continuous audits performed by the Department of Labor (DOL), and ongoing U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) site visits and inspections," says Frida

paperwork, but if [it's not] done, the [university] can be fined, and the fines are heavy," she says.

Universities may neglect the proper filings because of their labor-intensive nature. "Compliance is not respected because it's a nuisance," Glucoft says, adding, however, "It's a myth that no one will come after us in education." Institutions should avoid the temptation to believe that the institution's status as an educational establishment or as a nonprofit organization will provide protection from the laws surrounding work visas.

The self-audit

Glucoft recommends that universities complete an internal self-audit of their handling of international employees.

university correct any mistakes, as the attorney can "give guidelines on what is a permissible correction and what is not," Glucoff says. Not all problems can be fixed. "Sometimes it's 'better late than never,' and sometimes there's nothing you can do," Glucoff says. However, the fact that the university initiated a self-audit goes a long way toward establishing that the university has made a good-faith effort to comply with the law.

One of the most common errors, Glucoff says, is mixing confidential information with less sensitive data. "Immigration forms have very confidential information; the most common mistake is mixing confidential information with other information."

Another way universities can demonstrate their good-faith efforts to comply with the law is by having educational programs in place. Lunch-and-learns, seminars, and other educational offerings for those who hire help demonstrate that the university is interested in ensuring that its employees are complying with the law. The flyers from those educational sessions should be kept in a file in case the university is questioned.

Above all, Glucoff urges universities, "Don't underestimate [the importance of] maintaining files and data." She notes that the "focus seems to be on enforcement right now," and the university that is diligent about maintaining proper files will be more prepared when questions come.

Jennifer Patterson Lorenzetti is managing editor of Academic Leader. ▼

It's a myth that no one will come after us in education.

Glucoft, partner at Mitchell Silberberg & Knupp LLP in Los Angeles. Making sure that these requirements are filled is not just the responsibility of HR; academic leaders must also understand what the requirements are in order to keep their university in compliance.

The importance of compliance

"Most problems with [work visas] come up with compliance," says Glucoft. "It's not about whether [the employee] is legally working or not," she says, noting that most international hires are eligible to work legally in the U.S. However, if the university neglects the proper filings, the consequences can be expensive and time-consuming. "The H-1B visa requires a lot of

Conducting a self-audit has several benefits.

"An internal self-audit gives peace of mind to [university] executives," Glucoft says. She recommends that the auditor pull random examples of affected employee files from across the alphabet, then examine those files to see whether any patterns emerge. If errors are made in multiple files, it may indicate that a correction needs to be made across the processing system and across an entire group of files.

The self-audit should be conducted by someone outside the university with legal training rather than leaving the task for HR. "HR is bombarded with paperwork," Glucoff notes. "There has to be legal input to do this." Going to an outside attorney will also help the