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Meaningful Reviews: Reframing Evaluation to Yield Positive Change

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Title: Meaningful Reviews: Reframing Evaluation to Yield Positive Change

Presenter bio: Sharon Decker is the Chair of the English & Foreign Languages Department and an Associate Professor at Centenary University. She is an active participant on various planning, evaluation, and assessment committees on campus, as well as a peer evaluator for the Middle States Commission on Higher Education.

Theme: Evaluation and Assessment

Type: Best practice presentation (30-35 minutes)

Abstract: This session will focus on how to reframe the culture of evaluation in order to encourage active and engaged faculty participation. The discussion will center on objectives, forms, and outcomes in order to create a process that will ultimately improve pedagogical techniques and philosophies.

5 Keywords: Evaluation, Assessment, Peer Observation, Teaching Excellence, Self-Reflection

Presentation Overview:

Peer evaluation is an important part of faculty development. Ideally, a meaningful evaluation will enable faculty to reflect upon several points: pedagogical techniques, how successfully content is communicated, how engaged the students are, and how well the faculty member meets her own goals in the course. However, on many campuses, the peer evaluation process is somewhat fraught given power dynamics, evaluation inflation, and lack of faculty buy-in (to name just a few issues). The conversations across campuses have to change in order to reflect the goals of the observations themselves: to assist people in becoming more effective teachers. In this context, the word “effective” does not necessarily dictate teaching style or philosophy, but it does imply that faculty are succeeding in creating engaging learning environments and fostering academic discourse.

In order to change the culture of evaluation, the process itself must be re-thought. On many campuses, the observation is simply a box checked off on the way to promotion or tenure, or it is viewed as *something that must be done* as opposed to *something that people actively seek out* in order to improve their own teaching. With the latter goal in mind, my campus has spent the last two years working on reconstructing the ideology of evaluation. We have rewritten forms, tweaked procedures and deadlines, eliminated unnecessary steps, and most importantly, we have educated the faculty about the value of a meaningful observation. In doing so, we believe we have actively changed the culture of evaluation in such a way that the process now yields feedback that helps faculty refine instruction and also actively self-reflect upon the very idea of observation itself. Our hope is that in a few years we will be able to see

more engaged and engaging teachers in our classrooms, and also more people mentoring faculty not just as researchers but as teachers.

Overall, this presentation will discuss the objectives behind meaningful observations, examine various forms that have been created, and engage the audience in conversations about how such changes could be effective and effected on their campuses. Only by creating conditions where people are encouraged to do their best and understand why the process itself is important will people be motivated to participate. The end result is time-consuming and not always comfortable in terms of the degree of self-reflection that is required; however, if a culture of recognition, reflection, and responsibility is created, faculty members have the opportunity to transform themselves.