Implementing Faculty Success with Review, Promotion and Tenure at University of Northern Colorado

The challenge

The original steering committee that purchased Watermark Faculty Success (formerly Digital Measures) for UNCO in 2014 didn't have a clear vision of how to get the most from a faculty activity reporting system. The committee structure and a lack of a clear vision meant that the committee struggled to implement major changes on how to encourage faculty to use the software until 2016, when the provost challenged the committee and provided a detailed charge. New committee chairman Mark Smith, Associate Dean, College of Natural and Health Sciences, engaged the challenge, proposing how UNCO could digitize the university's entire faculty evaluation process, including annual, biannual, pre-tenure, comprehensive, and promotion and tenure reviews, within three academic years.

An additional challenge was a constant: turnover in other campus IT systems. "Today, it's a new version of Banner, tomorrow a learning software change or a different ticketing system. And some rollouts of those systems haven't gone so well," Smith said. "So people are skeptical when they hear, 'but this one will be better.'"

The solution

With a mission of transforming the faculty evaluation process identified, UNCO needed a project plan to ensure they implemented Faculty Success and the

Review, Promotion and Tenure module on deadline. In addition, the project team needed guidance. Smith approached Stacy Becker, Client Success Manager, who pushed his team to share a project plan and commit to a schedule. "Stacy convinced me to have weekly project meetings. At first, I didn't see the need, but it helped us meet deadlines and goals," Smith said. "Checking in kept us motivated and problems could be solved quickly. There were never any emergencies because we had a plan and regular, scheduled contact in place."

The win

Within six months, UNCO's biggest college, the College of Natural and Health Sciences, had seven out of eight units using Faculty Success for annual review reporting, and its second largest college, the College of Education had 70 to 80 percent of its units using Faculty Success for reviews as well. "The provost was excited about it, requiring all of the university to use it for annual and biannual reporting beginning in Fall 2017," Smith said.

Smith identified a key factor for success for the system: engaging faculty to enter their teaching, research and service. "The system is only as good as the data in it, so how would we make sure it's complete and keep it up to date?" Mandating using the system for reviews helped, but so did one of the system's payoffs—the promise

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of entering activities once and using them many times. "Faculty have a lot of things to do. We have six colleges, and a typical workload of 60-20-20, sometimes 40-40-20, which is important when talking about getting a system on track," Smith said. "I didn't want to keep going to faculty asking for information—'Can you tell me this? Can you figure this out?' We committed to using data in the system for the university's reporting needs."

UNCO pushed to make Faculty Success as productive as possible—for faculty as well as the university. Links built into the university CV ensure that faculty don't have to go back and pull articles to include in review materials. In turn, reviewers don't have to dig through binders to find a cited item, but can simply click a link in the CV. The same is true for teaching evaluations. "We required faculty to enter four to five years of back data," Smith said. "And now they're saying, 'Oh, this is why—now I don't have to go back and pull these articles!'" As a result, "we've had ridiculous success with faculty buy-in," Smith said.

With reporting successfully underway, UNCO decided to tackle digitizing processes with the Reviews, Promotion and Tenure module (formerly Workflow). "When Watermark introduced this new functionality, we jumped in with both feet," Smith said. "Biology, one of the biggest schools in my college, didn't even see the launch screens before agreeing to try it. They trusted the process and the software."

In fact, the department dove directly into tenure and promotion. "That wasn't our original plan for a first step, but we got courageous and went for it," Smith said. "Since they're putting the information in, we wanted faculty to use it all in one place and see the value."

The UNCO units that have already used the Reviews, Promotion and Tenure module are pleased. "The majority of faculty and reviewers enjoyed the process," Smith said. Wider rollout is planned for the coming academic year, and Smith expects to meet—or beat—the goals established in 2016.

UNCO'S keys to success

Set a project plan: "Draft a strategic plan and a proposal document outlining your reporting goals, individual and group responsibilities, and timelines. Then, communicate and/or present your proposal to all stakeholders at appropriate levels. Explain to the provost why this plan is beneficial and will work. Make sure deans are on board and supportive," Smith said. "And reach out to faculty. They'll have to use the system, so share the plan, why it will work, and why it benefits them to put all this information in."

Promote, promote, promote: "I attribute much of our success to promoting the system. We have done a lot of walking around campus, going to meetings and offices of deans and the provost, taking every opportunity to say 'have you heard of this?' and then doing the work [of

incorporating their input] and doing it well," Smith said. "In addition, be sure you provide training, and train your helpdesk to assist faculty."

Involve the right stakeholders: Ensuring support and resources for the project is vital, so you need a project champion and and a team with the needed skills and necessary time to dedicate to the project. When UNCO's new steering committee formed, it had support from the provost, and included academic assistant/associate deans as well as strong representation from IT. "IT could deal with things like Banner integration, security roles and reporting," Smith said. "As an associate dean in an academic college, my job includes overseeing faculty evaluation. As a former faculty member, I could show them how to use the system with my own data." In addition, subcommittees focused on specific issues such as university reporting and technology.

Attend the annual user conference: As part of project planning, Becker suggested that Smith attend the annual user conference to meet peers from other institutions using Faculty Success for similar purposes. "The conference was one of the big starting points for us," Smith said. "I came back knowing what others were doing and that we could do it too."

About us

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