



MEMORANDUM

To: Dr. Morgan Benton
From: Dr. Eric Maslen, Department Head, ISAT Department
Subject: Annual Performance Evaluation, 2015-2016
CC: Dr. Robert Kolvoord, Dean of the College of Integrated Science and Engineering
Date: 23 July 2016

Your performance for the 2015-2016 academic year has been evaluated using the ISAT Criteria Guidelines for Annual Evaluation. I have looked at your work in the areas of teaching, scholarship and service.

Teaching

I find your teaching to be excellent. As in the past, your students greatly admire your knowledge of your subject material and the care you take with their approach to learning. In response to growing discontent amongst your students with your “pick your own grade” approach to motivating and rewarding students, you adopted a point system this year that focused largely on student effort. My read of student comments is that they were mostly okay with this approach although they felt that you need to adjust the balance of credit amongst the various “badges” in order to better reflect the underlying implied relative effort. In your own assessment, you report feeling that students are “less than enthusiastic about” this approach and that you have decided to return to the prior approach. I’m not sure that you are reaching the right conclusion in that negative comments relating to course structure - where they occurred - did not seem to particularly correlate with student views on the point system. That is, you still have some students who simply want more structure - predictable lectures on topics outlined in a syllabus and a project sequence that aligns with these lectures. I think that you can expect this type of student to remain discontented as long as you structure your classes as you do, and it won’t matter how you grade. I hope that you will continue to pursue your ideas about self-motivated learning and that you’ll find a way to engage students in this process that works for all, or at least the substantial majority, of your students.

One negative comment that popped up here and there was a complaint that you sometimes miss class without giving your students any notice of this. I would encourage you to develop a strategy for avoiding this - everybody has to miss class once in a while, but try to make sure that students either get advance notice or that you have someone else cover your class for you. The other concern you also acknowledge: getting feedback on their work to your students in a timely manner. I would think that this would significantly undermine the goals of self-motivated learning so you should probably reflect on the nature of the feedback you are attempting to give and find ways to provide this in a more timely manner.

Beyond the classroom, you mentored three current and another three rising capstone project groups and very successfully mentored a team of coders in the 2016 Annual Caring for the Caregiver Hackathon in Richmond, VA, placing first in both rounds one and two and leading to formation of an LLC around the software product that the team produced. In your role as the chair of the Faculty Senate’s Academic Policies Committee, you brought forward a white paper on the notion of micro-curricula at JMU.

You were also very prolific in sharing your ideas with the broader educational community: you gave three presentations on pedagogy at conferences and co-organized the Black Rock Educators consortium.

Scholarship

I find your scholarship to be **excellent**. As you state succinctly in your annual report, your “research still remains firmly entrenched in the STEM to STEAM area, and nearly all of [your] scholarly activity revolves around the philosophy, science, and development of new pedagogy.” You have been very productive over the past year in pursuit of these ideas, delivering four invited lectures, maintaining a very active and widely read blog, publishing three book reviews, and publishing eight peer-reviewed journal articles. You had four capstone students and you used your scholarly agenda to provide a platform for these research experiences, leading to a publication co-authored with one of these students.

Service

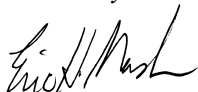
I find your service to be **satisfactory plus**. At the department level, you were a very active member of the assessment committee and also participated on the IKM and social context teaching teams. At the university level, you served as the department’s representative to the JMU faculty senate and, within the senate, you chaired the Academic Policies committee. You served as a judge for the Bluestone Hacks competition and as a member of the board of directors of FUELED, a student-led effort to bring a healthy, locally-sourced food truck to campus. You led a cross-disciplinary team of students in the 2016 Annual Caring for the Caregiver Hackathon, leading to first place finishes in both round 1 and round 2 of the competition and ultimately resulting in formation of an LLC to commercialize the software product of this effort. You also served as the faculty advisor to the Japan Club.

Summary

In addition to the three areas in which all faculty members work, within ISAT we also emphasize the importance of personal leadership, professional commitment, and professional collegiality. You have demonstrated satisfactory personal leadership and professional commitment over the past year. You are consistently collegial.

The faculty handbook states, “In addition to an evaluation in each of the three areas of performance, the faculty member’s overall performance must be evaluated as satisfactory or unsatisfactory.” Overall, I have assessed your performance for the year to be satisfactory.

Submitted by



*Eric Maslen,
Department Head, ISAT*

23 July 2016

Date

I have reviewed this document, discussed the contents with my department head, and acknowledge this with my signature. My signature does not necessarily mean that I agree with the assessment of my performance.

Faculty Member Signature

Date