Faculty Activity Reporting: How to Manage It Quickly, Efficiently, and Accurately
Abstract

Maintaining an up-to-date curriculum vitae (CV)—the most valuable source for accurate faculty activity information—is often a low priority for faculty members. This leaves administrative and data management staff to generate reports, and campus leaders to base decisions on a patchwork of incomplete or outdated information.

Most administrators and faculty will agree that the decentralized data management systems used to track faculty activities are inherently inefficient, time consuming, and generally a waste of administrative resources. After all, when using a decentralized system, it takes a lot of effort to generate useful reports and analyses, including:

- Collecting data from scattered sources,
- Mining data from documents to produce usable statistics, and
- Fitting data into stringent format requirements.

All of these require hours of inefficient work.

A centralized data management system can make reporting on faculty members’ activities quicker, more efficient, and significantly more accurate. The combination of a centralized database of all faculty activities and report templates, both built-in and customized, makes reporting easier. In addition, a single data warehouse that gives multiple users across the campus permission-based access puts reports and analysis into the hands of those who need it most: campus leaders, administrative staff, and faculty.

Challenges

Producing Faculty Activity Reports from Scattered Data Sources

Academic institutions likely have immediate access to accurate, up-to-date information on their financial status, student enrollment and demographics, and courses taught, to name a few. Unfortunately, campus leaders, administrators, institutional research offices, and faculty rarely have ready access to a repository of all faculty activity data.

Accurately reporting the activities of faculty members is as vital to every academic institution as it is to the faculty members themselves. Reports are used to demonstrate how faculty members are advancing in their careers and fields, which in turn illustrates the success of a department, school, college, or university. Yet it can be overwhelming to sort through volumes of information collected from scattered sources, and, even more challenging to organize it into a cohesive, analytical report.

The number of faculty activity reports needed is staggering.

- Abstracts
- Academic appointments
- Affiliations and memberships activities
- Awards
- Book and book chapters authored
- Consulting
- Courses taught
- Editorships
- Educational courses and curricula developed
- Graduate student advisorships
- Grants received/funded research
- Invited lectureships
- Letters and reviews
- Local and national appointments
- Managerial experience
- Monographs and reports
- Patents
- Peer reviewer for professional publications
- Post-doctoral mentorships
- Presentations
- Professional licenses
- Professional memberships
- Publication articles
- Research interests
- Research projects
- Service activities
- Short papers
- University appointments
- Work history
Decision Making Suffers Without Timely Access to Data

Timely access to up-to-date information on faculty members’ activities is clearly vital. Waiting until the end of the semester or academic year, or coaxing the information from busy faculty members right before an accreditation review, is not an efficient data collection methodology. Reporting is then reduced to a snapshot of available information from a slice in time rather than a portrait of activities to date, and very little time is left for analysis.

And like it or not, regulatory bodies are stringent when it comes to information due dates. Relying on administrative staff to produce timely reports using inefficient systems—through no fault of their own—can take too much time.

An accurate analysis of data—in this case, faculty members’ activities—is critical to sound decision-making and accurately portraying the school’s activities. If information is unavailable, incomplete, or spurious, decisions are made with less confidence, and the image of the school may be inaccurate, distorted or, at worst, tarnished.

Decreasing Resources, Increasing Needs

Because the economy has forced virtually every category of resource to be cut or “trimmed,” everyone is looking for ways to save time. Everyone is doing the job of two—or three—people as a result of fewer staff, which makes efficiency more critical than ever. The reporting needs of academic institutions have not slowed; in fact, they have increased as greater accountability and transparency is expected or mandated. The story is familiar: fewer staff and more work for those who remain.

Gathering information from several sources adds to one or more persons’ workload and often results in inaccurate information. Moreover, the information collected—and the format in which it is presented—is very often department- or school-focused. Or worse, the data needed may not yet have been collected. Even though individuals from multiple departments are likely harvesting information for their own use, others often cannot use it because it is not readily available.

That said, it should be easy to produce perennial reports. Since the same data have been collected in the past, one would assume that the school has a process for data collection and established report formats. However, because this often is not the case, it remains challenging, frustrating, and extremely time-consuming to gather data from others and format reports.

Faculty Are Often the Bottleneck

Faculty members regularly provide reports on their activities and accomplishments to a variety of internal and external constituents. However, on a faculty member’s priority list, maintaining an up-to-date CV often appears near the bottom. In addition, faculty members may keep their activity information in a number of locations:

- On their computer;
- In piles on their office floor;
- In filing cabinets, either in the office or at home; or
- Exclusively in their head.

Who on campus needs faculty activity information?

Several audiences on campus regularly require reports on faculty activities.

Campus leaders and decision makers—including presidents, provosts, chancellors, department heads, and other administrators—who need to analyze all of the faculty activity information and distill it to make critical decisions and comply with requests from internal and external constituents.

Institutional research office employees who are tasked with collecting and organizing faculty activity information, and providing meaningful reports to campus leaders and other internal audiences, such as the marketing department and IT staff for campus websites.

Faculty members keeping track of their ongoing professional activities in the form of CVs for a number of purposes, not the least of which are career advancement, salary increases, promotions, tenure, grants, and contracts.
Unfortunately, it is generally impossible to gain immediate access to these locations.

Even when curricula vitae are up-to-date, they are most often maintained in a word-processing document. When a faculty member adds a recent research project to page 13 of a 42-page CV, he or she may need to then reformat pages 13-42—a potential nightmare.

Faculty may experience a similar nightmare when mining information from the repository of their life’s work. If the CV is in a word-processing document, there is no convenient way to extract data across a number of categories without reviewing it page-by-page, and cutting and pasting information into a new document that must also meet stringent formatting requirements.

**SOLUTION**

Centralized Faculty Activity Data Management System with Multiple Reporting Capabilities

Fortunately, schools can take advantage of a data management solution with centralized data warehousing to keep track of faculty activities. Such a solution can make everyone’s life easier and more efficient by streamlining the process of producing useful reports and analyses of faculty activities. In fact, it would enable users across the entire campus to focus on using reports instead of preparing them. Here’s how.

Faculty benefit from a centralized data warehouse because they can use it as a repository to record activities over time. As a result, they will not be scrambling to update their CV and associated documents once each year. At the same time, they are freed from having to fill in a variety of report templates and keeping their information up to date on the school’s website.

Administrators can simply pull requisite data from the system and generate needed reports, including those for organizations such as the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the National Science Foundation (NSF), and accrediting bodies. Administrators also benefit in other ways. With a centralized system featuring pre-configured report templates, producing reports is a matter of a few clicks. That means no more hours or days of chasing faculty down and aggregating information from tens or hundreds of disparate, unstructured, and inconsistent documents. Likewise, with ready access to all needed information through a search mechanism or a report, campus leaders can more quickly make decisions, allocate resources, and summarize faculty activities.
Academic leaders, administrators, and department heads are responsible for reporting faculty activity to demonstrate:

- Compliance with professional and regional accreditation bodies
- Alignment with System and State reporting requirements
- Research and other activities to maintain existing funding or seek additional funding from government entities and private granting organizations
- Noteworthy successes to attract highly qualified faculty—and the accompanying research funding—and maintain the school's image
- Readiness of faculty members for advancement
- Annual activities of departments, schools, colleges, and the campus for internal and external constituents

**CONCLUSION**

Implementing a centralized data management system for tracking and reporting on faculty activities will increase a school’s efficiency; offload time-consuming, repetitive tasks from faculty and staff; improve data usability; and provide reports that are more accurate and up to date for everyone.

Ready to take the next step in more quickly, efficiently, and accurately managing faculty activity reporting? Check out our white paper: *Comparing Faculty Activity Reporting Solutions: Online vs DIY.*

**About Digital Measures**

Digital Measures focuses exclusively on data management and reporting solutions for college and university campuses worldwide. The company’s web-based flagship solutions are Activity Insight™, a faculty activity data management system specifically developed to meet the needs of academic institutions, and Course Response™, a course evaluation solution. Activity Insight is used to manage critical information for accreditation and personnel management by more than 2,000 colleges and schools on university campuses in more than twenty-five countries. It provides the most reliable, versatile, and secure solution for easily generating custom reports in real time. Digital Measures’ clients include 60% of campuses of higher education that have 5,000 or more students.

**Digital Measures**

Digital Measures and Activity Insight are your **best solution** for efficient faculty activity reporting. For more information, visit [www.digitalmeasures.com](http://www.digitalmeasures.com) or contact Digital Measures at 866-348-5677.