A Review and Recommendations for Evaluating Teaching Excellence

Executive Summary

January 7, 2013

ABSTRACT

Central Michigan University is committed to providing a quality educational experience for students and to assisting faculty with this vital mission. One way of assessing this vital mission is to document and evaluate teaching effectiveness. Thus, this summary, developed by the Faculty Center for Innovative Teaching (FaCIT), is intended to assist faculty, their peers, promotion and tenure committee members, chairs, and senior-level administrators with objective measures that offer opportunities for formative and summative assessment to help inform decision-making about teaching effectiveness for the purposes of annual review, reappointment, promotion, and tenure. In addition, by incorporating a comprehensive model of faculty evaluation that includes multiple sources of evidence, these sources of evidence can then better inform how students are learning and results can connect with the broader mission of teaching excellence and student success at CMU. (The complete document can be accessed at [http://bit.ly/XDKY48](http://bit.ly/XDKY48)) There is no perfect way to evaluate teaching. This resource, however, provides evidence-based tools for the most effective ways in which to evaluate teaching, and thus provides the basis for substantive, focused conversations and ultimately decisions about what tools and processes an academic department may use to sensibly evaluate teaching.

Developed by Eron Drake, Instructional Designer, FaCIT, and Lauren Miller Griffith, Instructional Designer, FaCIT. Special acknowledgments to Adam Barragato, Fixed term Faculty, Communication and Dramatic Arts, for his work entitled “Suggestions for Evaluating Teaching Effectiveness” (2011).
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High-Impact Student Learning at Central Michigan University

Central Michigan University is committed to providing a quality educational experience for students and to assisting faculty with this vital mission. One way of assessing this vital mission is to document and evaluate teaching effectiveness. Hence, this document overviews the current sources of evidence used to help inform decision-making about teaching excellence for the purposes of annual review, reappointment, promotion, and tenure at CMU based on a content review of departmental bylaws. What's more, several sources of evidence are overviewed that can be used to document and evaluate learning outcomes and teaching effectiveness. These reviews include a summary of current research findings, advantages and disadvantages, and sample evaluation rubrics.

This document is intended to assist faculty, their peers, promotion and tenure committee members, chairs, and senior-level administrators with objective measures that offer opportunities for formative and summative assessment. Further, by incorporating a comprehensive model of faculty evaluation that include multiple sources of evidence (e.g., peer review of teaching, teaching portfolio, self-reflection, exit and alumni ratings, employer ratings, administrator ratings, teaching scholarship, teaching awards, letters of support, chair's annual review), these sources of evidence can then better inform how students are learning and results can connect with the broader mission of teaching excellence and student success at CMU.

There is no perfect way to evaluate teaching. This document, however, provides evidence-based tools for the most effective ways in which to evaluate teaching, and thus provides the basis for
substantive, focused conversations and ultimately decisions about what tools and processes an academic department may use to sensibly evaluate teaching.

**Recommendations for Consideration**

Researchers recommend a comprehensive model of faculty evaluation that include multiple sources of evidence (e.g., peer review of teaching, teaching portfolio, self-reflection, exit and alumni ratings, employer ratings, administrator ratings, teaching scholarship, teaching awards, letters of support, chair’s annual review). More specifically, a model that includes the strategic selection of at least three sources whereby the strengths of each source can compensate for the weaknesses of other sources, enables a decision about teaching effectiveness that is more accurate than one based on any single source (Appling, Naumann, & Berk, 2001). One model, currently under development at CMU, offers an excellent example of how multiple sources of evidence can be used to document teaching effectiveness, while at the same time recognizing the quality of the teaching evaluation criteria for the evaluation of teaching.

**CMU Sources of Evidence for the Documentation and Evaluation of Teaching**

Based on a content analysis of the departmental bylaws for 35 departments at Central Michigan University, specifically focusing on statements related to the documentation and evaluation of teaching effectiveness, the top 15 sources of evidence are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Sources of Evidence Used for the Documentation and Evaluation of Teaching at CMU

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top 15*</th>
<th>Source of Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Student Opinion Survey (or other approved student evaluation survey instrument)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Effective student advising and counseling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Appropriateness of student evaluation techniques (e.g., well-constructed tests, pre- and post-test results, student performance on standardized exams, grade distribution)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Comprehensive syllabi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Ability to direct students in their research and creative work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Innovative teaching methods, materials, and courses (also evidence of integration of new technologies and evidence of development of new course demonstrating experimentation with teaching techniques)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Teaching awards (e.g., nominations or recognition by student organizations)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Professional development (e.g., professional training, certification, participation in workshops, attendance at symposia/conferences)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Subsequent student success (e.g., student performance in competitions and auditions, success in professional field, success in graduate school)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Instructional materials (e.g., handouts, study guides, computer-mediated presentations, computer-assisted learning activities, projects, cases, web pages, field guides)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Peer review of teaching competence (e.g., instructional materials, assessment techniques, presentation skills, understanding of subject matter, skill and fairness in evaluating student work, positive student/instructor interactions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Peer review: Classroom observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Self-evaluation or narrative offering evidence of effective teaching (e.g., reflection on one’s teaching effectiveness and the degree of student learning in one’s classes or annotated instructional materials)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 14      | Examples of student work (e.g., images of students’ work, copies of work that show faculty evaluation and
Additional sources of evidence included a philosophy of teaching statement; external input or recommendations from professionals in the field, community members, and/or alumni; grant-writing activities; a portfolio; and leading or participating in the development of curricula or program-level assessment tools and plans. In brief, all CMU departments recommended multiple sources of evidence to document and evaluate teaching. Additionally, the majority of departments required a committee review process, a peer review system, or recommended peer review of teaching and/or instructional materials.

**Sources of Evidence that Align with Best Practices**

In order to effectively evaluate teaching, Cashin (1996) recommended the documentation of effective teaching in the following areas: (1) subject matter mastery, (2) curriculum development, (3) course design, (4) delivery of instruction, (5) assessment of learning, (6) availability to students, and (7) administrative requirements. To assist faculty and academic administrators in the documentation and evaluation of teaching at CMU, a detailed description, advantages and disadvantages, sample evaluation tools, and recommended resources accompany the following sources of evidence:

1. Student Evaluation of Teaching
2. Peer Review (Classroom Observations)
3. Peer Review (Materials)
4. Course Portfolio
5. Teaching Portfolio
6. Reflective Statements on Teaching
7. Teaching Philosophy Statements
8. The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL)

In addition, to aid CMU’s transition to a learning paradigm and learning-centered teaching, a self-assessment of five learning-centered approaches is introduced in the “Reflective Statements on Teaching” section from Blumberg & Gonzalez-Major’s book entitled, “Becoming a Learning-Centered Teacher.”
Student Evaluation of Teaching

Research on student evaluation of teaching is plentiful. Indeed, “there has been more research on student ratings than on any other topic – something over 2,000 studies.” (McKeachie & Svinicki, 2006, p. 352). As a result, there is overwhelming evidence that student ratings of teaching effectiveness, as part of a faculty evaluation system, are valid and reliable for the purposes of providing formative and summative evaluation of faculty. However, student ratings alone are not a sufficient source for evidence for summative decisions (decisions related to annual merit pay, promotion, and tenure). In fact, there are a number of components of effective teaching that students are not equipped to judge, including: “the appropriateness of an instructor’s objectives; the instructor’s knowledge of the subject matter; the degree to which instructional processes or materials are current, balanced, and relevant to objectives; the quality and appropriateness of assessment methods; the appropriateness of grading standard; the instructor’s support for department teaching efforts such as curriculum development and mentoring new faculty; and the instructors contribution to a department climate that values teaching” (Pallett, 2006, p. 56). Faculty peers, professional colleagues, and department/division chairs are much better qualified to address such issues (Pallett, 2006).

Peer Review: An Overview

If teaching performance is to be recognized and rewarded as scholarship, as redefined in the early 1990’s by Boyer (1990) and Rice (1991), to include the scholarship of discovery, integration, application, and teaching, it should be subjected to the same rigorous process and judged by the same high standards applied to other forms of scholarship (Berk, Naumann & Appling, 2004). Peer review of teaching is composed of two activities: peer observation of teaching performance and peer review of the written documents used in a course. Both forms of peer review should be included in a comprehensive system, where possible (Berk et al., 2004).

Peer Review of Teaching (Classroom Observation)

In higher education, classroom observation is perhaps the most familiar form of peer review. Unfortunately, it is prone to reliability problems, often the unintentional result when peers make brief visits and report from the perspective of their own, often unknown, biases. The evaluation literature makes it clear that the consistent presence of students in the classroom makes them a better source of information about such things as an instructor’s approach, fairness, clarity of explanations, and the like. However, peers are more accurate judges of such areas as the relevancy of subject matter, competency of the instructor, or the instructor’s use of teaching strategies current to the discipline. For those purposes, peer review is important (Chism, 2007).

Despite the challenges related to the reliability of peer observations, they have been accepted as a legitimate mechanism for providing meaningful data for teaching improvement. Peer observations can serve as a valuable additional rather than alternative to student ratings and the teaching portfolio. Table 6 offers additional advantages and disadvantages for consideration. Nonetheless, it is important to triangulate evaluation data by using multiple methods to compensate for the inadequacies in each method (Berk, 2004).
When conducting a peer reviewed observation of teaching, researchers recommend a three-step process, which includes (1) a pre-observation meeting to obtain contextual information about the course, instructor and students; (2) the observation which can include a holistic approach utilizing narrative report and a checklist or rating form to assess specific aspects of the class; and (3) a post-observation meeting with the instructor to debrief the class session with the peer reviewer and the instructor providing reflections (Chism, 2007; Selden and Associates, 2006).

**Peer Review of Course Materials**

The peer review of course materials typically includes the review and rating of the quality of the course syllabus, instructional plans and materials, projects or tests, and instructor comments on student work. Researchers suggest that informed and well trained peers, especially those within the same field, are ideally suited to assess the accuracy and adequacy of instructional materials (Chism, 2007; Yon, Burnap & Kohut, 2002).

**Teaching Portfolio**

The teaching portfolio presents an evidence-based argument about one’s teaching. A typical portfolio includes a narrative section followed by extensive appendices that provide example syllabi, lesson plans, evaluations, certifications, examples of scholarly work on teaching, etc. (e.g., Seldin, Miller & Seldin, 2010; Wolf, 1996). The material contained in the appendices should be selective, presenting those pieces that best support the central thesis contained in the narrative body (Urbach, 1992). The portfolio should be thought of as part of an individual’s professional development, but it can also document and demonstrate high quality teaching for promotion, tenure, and reappointment committees (Murray, 1996).

**Course Portfolio**

The course portfolio consists of an evidence-based reflection on the connection between teaching and learning in a particular course (Cerbin, 1994; Hutchings 1998). A course portfolio should articulate the professor’s goals for the course, the methods used to achieve those goals, and an assessment of how well those goals were achieved (New et al., 2008). Similar to a teaching portfolio, supporting artifacts are generally placed in an appendix. A course portfolio takes what might otherwise disintegrate into a random assemblage of teaching artifacts and gives them scholarly coherence, much like a “manuscript in progress” organizes one’s ideas about a research project (Cerbin, 2001).
Reflective Statements on Teaching Effectiveness

At CMU, reflection on one’s teaching effectiveness for purposes of evaluation is required or recommended in a variety of ways. Some bylaws recommend that faculty members provide “a brief narrative discussion teaching effectiveness,” or a “reflection on information about one’s teaching effectiveness and the degree of student learning in one’s classes,” while another department suggests “video- or audiotapes of teaching accompanied by reflective analysis.” Other examples of reflection included “annotation of instructional materials that demonstrate the organization and contents of the course,” a self-evaluation, or a summary statement of teaching goals and accomplishments.

Pedagogical reflective practice is defined as teaching practice in which the teacher undertakes deliberate and sustained reflection and action for the purpose of improvement (Hall, 1997). Typically, reflection is a three-part process that involves: (1) the event itself, (2) recollection of the event, and (3) review and response to the event (Richards, 1991). By definition, the reflection is based in teaching, yet acknowledges the learning context.

Becoming a Learning-Centered Teacher: Self-Assessment of Learning Centered Practices

As CMU endeavors to move to a learning paradigm, a self-assessment of learning centered practices is offered (see Table 10 below) as part of the section highlighting reflective statements on teaching effectiveness. Blumberg and Gonzalez-Major (2008) recommended that five learning centered practices be evaluated to assess whether faculty are transitioning or fully employing learning-centered approaches. These learning centered practices focus on the function of content, the role of the teacher, the responsibility for learning, and the processes and purposes of evaluation.

Statement of Teaching Philosophy

The statement of teaching philosophy reflects how and how well a faculty member’s teaching strategies are aligned with his or her instructional goals (Goodyear & Allchin, 1998). Statements of teaching philosophy should state clear objectives for student learning as well as evidence in support of the teacher’s effectiveness in helping students achieve these objectives (Mangum, 2009). Writing such a statement should “help teachers to reflect on their growth and renew their dedication to the goals and values that they hold” (Chism, 1998, p. 1). The statement is typically narrative in its approach, but should clearly articulate with disciplinary (Montell, 2003) and institutional (Schonwetter et al., 2002) priorities.

The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL)

Several CMU departments refer to the development, implementation, reflection, and presentation of teaching innovations as acceptable sources of evidence for the purpose of the evaluation of teaching. This process of integrating the experience of teaching with the scholarship of research is the definition of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning or “SoTL.” More specifically, SoTL is defined as the ongoing and cumulative intellectual inquiry, through systematic observations and

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ongoing investigations, by faculty into the nature of learning and the impact of teaching upon it (Hutchings & Schulman, 1999).

References


