University Distinguished Teaching Scholars
The Institute for Learning and Teaching

Assessing Teaching Effectiveness Task Force

Recommendations

Introduction

In spring 2011, the Faculty Council Committee on Teaching and Learning asked the University Distinguished Teaching Scholars and staff from the Institute for Learning and Teaching (TILT) to develop a set of recommendations for assessing teaching effectiveness. A TILT taskforce was established and met during the summer and into the fall. This report provides recommendations emerging from the Task Force. Those recommendations are:

1. Teaching effectiveness should be assessed in part through the use of teaching portfolios during merit, promotion, tenure, and post-tenure reviews. The University should develop a Web-based portfolio system that will allow faculty members to provide evidence of teaching effectiveness.
2. Teaching effectiveness should also be assessed through peer-observation of teaching.
3. Assessments of teaching effectiveness should include should include the faculty member's reflective statements on teaching performance and activities.
4. Existing professional development programs supporting teaching effectiveness—in TILT, in the Colleges and Departments, and in Student Affairs—should be continued or enhanced. These groups should collaborate on the development of new professional development programs supporting teaching effectiveness.

Below, we take up each of these recommendations in turn. We conclude with recommendations regarding potential changes to the Manual and suggest strategies for supporting the professional development activities described in this report.

Background

As we met, the following issues were raised and discussed. Our discussions of these issues shaped—to greater and lesser extents—the recommendations that follow.

Defining Teaching Effectiveness. The first issue we took up was, simply, the question of what is meant by "teaching effectiveness." Teaching is bound up tightly with learning, yet it is clear that learning outcomes—what students take away from a course in terms of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and abilities—are not synonymous with teaching effectiveness. Although they are closely linked, it is possible (albeit rare) to teach a course well without necessarily achieving the learning outcomes associated with course goals. Student attitudes and motivations (or the lack thereof), demands on student time that reduce the attention and effort they can devote to a course, and a range of environmental variables

(such as problems with a course management system used in an online course or poor acoustics in a lecture hall) can affect learning outcomes in a course that is taught "effectively." With that in mind, we concluded that any evaluation of teaching effectiveness must take into account not only what is learned by students but also, and importantly, the manner in which a course is designed, content is selected and delivered, and students are engaged in learning activities, among other issues. In addition, we concluded that any assessment of teaching effectiveness must consider the conditions under which a course is taught, such as its role in the AUCC core or in a particular major or minor, the technology used to support the course, the physical setting in which the course is taught, and the students who typically enroll in the course.

The Role of Professional Development. Our discussions were shaped by a shared belief—backed up by statements from a number of professional organizations—that ongoing professional development is a central part of being an effective teacher. We concluded that, as an institution, we should encourage faculty members to participate in professional development and reward them for doing so.

Institutional and Disciplinary Culture. Any attempt to assess teaching effectiveness must take into account institutional and disciplinary culture. Simply put, the agreed upon "best practices" in one discipline might be viewed with suspicion in another, most often because of long-standing agreements within a group about methods but also, and perhaps more importantly, because of genuine differences in content and methods across disciplines. As a result, we believe that teaching effectiveness is best assessed within a disciplinary or departmental context. This implies the central role of peer review within any assessment process and our recommendations are founded on the assumption that assessment must be grounded in agreed-upon standards that are likely to vary widely across the University.

We also recognize the likely impacts that institutional changes in how we assess teaching effectiveness will have on programs, departments, colleges, and the institution as a whole. The fact that this discussion is being initiated by Faculty Council will cause members of the Colorado State University community to pay attention to the issue. Some members of the community will react with concern, while others might see this as an opportunity to effect changes in their working conditions. If the recommendations we make below are put into effect, then we are likely to see changes in the reward structure at the University—with some faculty members viewing this as a gain and others perhaps seeing it as a loss. We urge Faculty Council to consider, as a result, both the conditions under which change might take place in our assessment of teaching effectiveness and the changes in institutional culture that might accompany implementation of those changes.

Position Descriptions and Career Path. We believe that an assessment process should take into account factors such as the position description of the faculty member and the point at which they find themselves in their careers. It would be wise to consider whether different assessment processes might be applied to faculty who are seeking tenure, already tenured, or in a non-tenure-line appointment. For example, it is possible that tenure-line faculty members entering a third-year review might find themselves in a position in which they have been given reduced teaching assignments so that they might focus their attention more fully on establishing their research agenda. As a result, they might have

taught only a handful of courses. How might peer reviewers address a situation like this? We believe that a rigorous peer-review process would consider the nature of the appointment as well as the point at which faculty members find themselves in their careers.

Types of Courses. Courses should be rigorously taught, regardless of whether they are first-year survey courses, senior capstones, or graduate seminars, whether they are required or elective, whether they are offered at a distance or face-to-face. That said, the teaching practices used in these types of courses are likely to vary widely. Any assessment process should consider the unique demands of a given course and factor those demands into the peer-review process.

Larger Debates about Teaching Effectiveness. Our discussions were also influenced by ongoing debates outside the University about assessing the effectiveness of primary and secondary teachers. Those debates range from calls to base assessment in large part on measures of student performance (most often as measured through standardized tests such as the CSAP and typically with an eye toward removing poor teachers from classrooms) to calls for a more contextually nuanced approach to assessment (almost always with a focus on using assessment to enhance teaching abilities). The latter perspective is the one with which we align ourselves and we ask that you consider the following recommendations within a framework that views teaching as a complex process that develops over time and requires a great deal of knowledge (both of course content and teaching practices). In the past few years, largely as a response to growing calls for assessing teaching performance within a "value-added" framework, a number of professional organizations have released statements defining teaching effectiveness. We are sympathetic to these definitions, which typically call for assessments that are:

- comprehensive (focusing on knowledge of subject matter, knowledge of teaching practices and learning theory, and teacher efforts to improve their practices through professional development);
- based on evidence (drawing on a wide range of information sources, including classroom observation, information provided by the faculty member, student work, and student performance on tests and other assessments);
- linked to professional development; and
- equitable and ethical (carried out without bias, respecting privacy, taking into account the context in which teaching takes place, and based on clearly defined criteria—and, in the case of higher education, on criteria developed by the faculty).

The following recommendations were shaped in part by our discussions of these considerations. They also reflect our experiences as teachers, researchers, and members of the faculty at Colorado State University.

Recommendation 1. Develop and Require a Web-based Teaching Portfolio

We recommend that departments make teaching portfolios a central part of their assessment processes. Ideally, the University should invest in a portfolio system that could be used across departments and colleges. Such a system might also serve as the foundation for an online review system that could be used for merit, promotion, tenure, and post-tenure performance reviews.

Many of the elements of a teaching portfolio are outlined in Section E.12.1 of the Manual and are included in the current tenure and promotion form. The elements listed below are broken out into recommended and suggested categories. Our expectation is that some of the elements—but by no means all—would be included in a given faculty member's teaching portfolio.

We anticipate that the system would be designed to allow faculty members to access "help" documents describing these elements and explaining their potential contributions to teaching and learning. In addition, we expect that professional development materials and workshops would be created to help faculty use the portfolio system effectively.

Recommended Evidence of Teaching Effectiveness

- A list of courses taught during the evaluation period (for each course, provide course name and number, enrollment, credit hours, and whether the course was co-taught)

- Curriculum development and course materials

    o Course proposals

    o Course syllabi

    o Lesson plans

    o Handouts

    o Web-based materials

    o Courseware

    o Evidence of dissemination of course materials

    o Assignments

    o Assessments (exams, quizzes, etc.)

- Evidence of integration of critical thinking activities into courses

- Evidence of effective technology use in teaching and learning

- Evidence of use of engaging activities outside of class sessions (e.g., group projects, support for formation of study groups, discussion forums, ePortfolios, wikis)

- Evidence of innovations in courses (e.g., improvements on past practices or efforts to incorporate new knowledge and processes within the discipline)

- Student course surveys

- Teaching awards

- Evidence of participation in professional development activities related to teaching and learning

- Contributions to the teaching culture in the program or department (such as mentoring colleagues, contributing to program development, sharing instructional materials, participating in TA or GTA training, serving on pedagogically oriented committees)

Suggested Evidence of Teaching Effectiveness

- Video recordings of class sessions or work in other teaching settings

- Summaries of mid-semester feedback sessions, if available

- Samples of instructor feedback on student work

- Samples of student work demonstrating critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, or other desired learning outcomes

- Samples of student self-assessments of their work

- Signed recommendations and letters from students

- Evidence of attention to academic integrity and disciplinary ethics in courses

- Descriptions or recordings of learner-centered teaching strategies, such as

    o Efforts to foster student questions (in-class or out-of-class)

    o Efforts to respond to student questions

    o Collaborative / cooperative activities in courses (in-class or out-of-class)

    o Integration of active and experiential learning activities into courses (as appropriate)

- Efforts to increase student engagement in courses, including

    o Integration of service learning

    o Integration of undergraduate research activities

    o Integration of tutoring and/or study groups into courses

- Evidence of engagement with the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, such as

    o Publications or works in progress related to teaching and learning (e.g., articles, textbooks, conference papers and other presentations)

    o Reports of studies of teaching and learning conducted by the faculty member

    o Application of relevant research (disciplinary and SoTL) to instructional activities

- Reports of consultations about teaching and learning issues conducted by the faculty member in other departments or programs or at other institutions

Recommendation 2. Encourage Peer-Review of Teaching Performance

We recommend that the faculty member's colleagues should participate in peer reviews of teaching performance (observing classroom instruction of various kinds). Depending on the departmental review process, the chair, members of the tenure and promotion committee or members of a periodic post-tenure review committee, or perhaps even the faculty member should provide reports written by colleagues who visited the faculty member's class sessions. These visits should be conducted by colleagues in their department or in a closely related program and should include a written report that describes the classes that were observed, identifies strengths, and addresses areas that would benefit from additional attention by the faculty member. Ideally, the report should provide an assessment of the quality of the teaching that was observed.

As is the case with our first recommendation, we expect that professional development materials and workshops would be developed to support peer review of teaching. Although TILT has made some progress in providing this support, more can be done.

Recommendation 3. Require the Production and Review of Reflective Statements on Teaching

We recommend that faculty members under review provide a reflective statement on teaching performance and activities. The faculty member should reflect on their work as a teacher, calling attention to their performance in courses, the activities in which they've engaged, and their contributions to their department's teaching mission. The faculty member should also address teaching goals (short term and long term) and reflect on their efforts to enhance teaching and learning in specific courses. The reflection should be tied to the Teaching Portfolio. The reflection could be provided in written form or as an audio or video clip.

We also support the develop of professional development initiatives supporting this recommendation.

Recommendation 4. Assess Existing and Develop New Professional Development Programs Supporting Teaching Effectiveness

We recommend assessing existing professional development programs and, as appropriate, developing additional forms of support. Below, we outline existing programs at TILT, in the colleges, and in the departments.

Existing Programs at TILT

- Master Teacher Initiative (operating in all eight colleges, the library, and in Student Affairs)

- Let's Talk Teaching (a mentoring program that could be expanded significantly)

- Professional Development Institute (offered annually, reaching roughly 800 members of the University community, but able to be developed further to support teaching and learning issues)

- Summer Conference and Workshop (offered every other spring, reaching roughly 150 instructors; workshops are offered annually, supporting roughly 40 instructors)

- Summer Retreat on Teaching and Learning (a new program that offers three to four days of concentrated professional development on specific teaching and learning issues)

- TILT Short Courses (seminars addressing key teaching and learning issues, typically offered across three to five meetings)

- TILT Workshops (a general category of professional development activities covering a range of issues over the course of the academic year)

- Instructional Designer Consultations (one-on-one support for the development and enhance of courses, improvement of teaching practices, and/or use of instructional technology)

- Custom Workshops for Programs and Departments (an option for departments with specific needs and interests, this program could be expanded significantly to support the recommendations in this document)

- Course Design Initiatives (currently, the Provost's Course Redesign Competition and support for online courses offered through DCE)

- Grants and Awards (currently offered in the areas of Service Learning and innovative use of instructional technology)

- Teaching Guides

- Teaching Tips

- Support for Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (offered in the form of support for working groups, pilot projects, and other initiatives focusing on enhancing pedagogy through research)

Existing Programs in the Colleges and Departments

- Awards for Excellence in Teaching

- Mentoring

- RamCT Support

- Support for Travel to Conferences and Workshops

Existing Programs Elsewhere in the University

- Awards (including the designation of University Distinguished Teaching Scholars)

Recommendations for Improving Professional Development Programs

Options include the following:

- Identifying individuals who are coming up for review (e.g., annual merit reviews, third-year comprehensive reviews, tenure and promotion reviews, and post-tenure review) and targeting them as an audience for specific professional development programs. Individuals could be encouraged to participate in these programs by department heads, deans, and other University leaders.

- Consulting with college tenure and promotion committees, department chairs, and associate deans to determine which activities might be most effective for individuals who are preparing for reviews.

Recommended New Programs at TILT

- **Workshops on the tenure and promotion process.** TILT might, for example, ask Deans to recommend faculty who could serve as leaders of such workshops – ideally, faculty who exemplified strong performance in the areas of teaching, research and artistry, service, and engagement. TILT could conduct workshops in broad disciplinary areas and could partner with the STEM Center on some workshops.

- **Online guides to the tenure and promotion process.** Exemplary past candidates could be asked to share their teaching materials and to comment on the development of the materials and their applications. The guides could provide access to textual materials, video interviews, and examples of effective materials.

- **Summer retreat on teaching excellence.** TILT could sponsor a retreat that brings together a group of scholars from other institutions to explore how to assess teaching effectiveness. With proper planning and execution, CSU might become a recognized location for studying and investigating this issue.

- **Other professional development workshop and materials.** TILT could offer workshops and materials addressing the development of teaching portfolios, effective peer review of teaching, and the creation of reflective statements on teaching.

Updates to the Manual and Support for Professional Development Initiatives

We suggest that the Faculty Council Committee on Teaching and Learning, cooperating with or consulting with other relevant Faculty Council standing committees, develop language for section E.12.1 outlining recommended processes for implementing a teaching portfolio system at the department, college, and University levels. We also suggest that the Committee determine whether other sections of the Manual should be revised to support the recommendations found in this document.

We ask the Committee to work with the Chair and Associate Chair of Faculty Council, the Faculty Council Executive Committee, and the Office of the Provost / Executive Vice President to ensure that resources are available to support expansion of professional development programs in this area.

Convener: Mike Palmquist

Taskforce Members: Rich Feller, Kate Kiefer, Mike Palmquist, Erica Suchman, Ray Whalen, and Toni Zimmerman

Report Submitted: December 7, 2011

For More Information: Contact Mike Palmquist at (970) 491-3132 or Mike.Palmquist@ColoState.edu.