

Teaching & Learning Committee Reports

Framework for Peer Evaluation of Teaching at the University of Saskatchewan: Best Practices

Approved by University Council June 19, 2003

Click [here](#) for examples of Peer Evaluation forms (pdf format)

This framework document should be read in conjunction with the University Council's document entitled [Principles of Evaluation of Teaching at the University of Saskatchewan](#) approved in March 2002. Units are encouraged to adopt these practices into their evaluation processes over time.

Philosophy

One of the goals of the University, as set out in A Framework for Planning at the University of Saskatchewan, is to improve the quality of instructional programs. The Framework document states that the University must be governed by considerations of quality and accountability. "A university that is quality conscious will be accountable to its students, its alumni and the people of the Province" (1998, p. 5). Strengthening the teaching evaluation processes over time will demonstrate the University's concern for quality instruction. By making the evaluation of teaching a more regular process of our teaching activities, the University will be more accountable to students and teachers alike. As the University strives for excellence based on international standards, it is important to gather information about our outstanding contributions to teaching.

University Council's Principles of Evaluation of Teaching at the University of Saskatchewan states "the evaluation of teaching at the University of Saskatchewan may serve several functions. Most importantly, teaching evaluations are to be used to assist faculty with the development and improvement of instruction. Data collected from teaching evaluations can also serve a summative function to assist with collegial and administrative decisions" (University of Saskatchewan, 2000, p. 4).

The University of Saskatchewan Standards for Promotion and Tenure establishes that "good teaching is expected of all faculty and evaluation of teaching . . . requires more than classroom performance. Candidates will be expected to demonstrate mastery of their subject area(s) or discipline(s), to make thorough preparation for their classes, to communicate effectively with their students, to show a willingness to respond to students' questions and concerns, and to exhibit fairness in evaluating students. . . faculty are expected to remain committed to improving/enhancing their teaching performance and to remedy problems identified with their teaching. As faculty progress through the ranks, they will be expected to extend their knowledge of their field(s) or discipline(s), i.e. with respect to classes, currency of the material presented, and new teaching methods" (University of Saskatchewan, 2002, http://www.usask.ca/vpacademic/collegial/university_StandardsFeb122002.shtml#D2). In addition, we advocate that faculty should consistently consider and employ effective teaching methods.

The University of Saskatchewan appreciates the commitment of sessional lecturers to good teaching. Teaching evaluations may be conducted for consideration of right of first refusal for sessional lecturers. Peer evaluations must be consistent with the procedures set out in Articles 14 - Right of First Refusal and 18 - Formal Teaching Assessment of the Collective Agreement between the University of Saskatchewan and CUPE 3287.

Commitment to high quality instruction and improvement of instruction is the responsibility of all engaged in instructional activities. Instructors should strive to achieve excellence in teaching and to explore best practices for student learning.

Peer Consultation

It is important to understand the difference between peer consultation and peer evaluation of teaching. Peer consultation is a process initiated at the request of the teacher as a way to gather feedback about their teaching. Often this type of peer coaching is non-evaluative and non-judgmental; it is based on classroom observation and/or a review of teaching materials followed by feedback on ways to improve specific instructional techniques (Valencia and Killion, 1988 as cited by Skinner and Welch, 1996). By contrast, formal peer evaluation is a process initiated by the Department Head or the Dean of a non-departmentalized college for the purpose of gathering information needed for collegial decision-making processes including renewal of probation, tenure, promotion, salary review, right of first refusal and for the review of academic programs.

For purposes of peer consultation, the Gwenna Moss Teaching and Learning Centre offers a [Peer Consultation Programme](#) for teachers, although teachers can initiate a consultation on their own. Peer consultants are not chosen from the client "s department or non-departmentalized college. The Programme at the Teaching and Learning Centre is voluntary, collaborative and confidential in nature. Teachers may request a consultation for many reasons:

1. To obtain feedback on changes they have made in a course;
2. To discover what's going well;
3. To improve their overall teaching skills or address a particular concern; and,
4. To discuss ideas and innovations with a peer

Peer Evaluation

Peer evaluations are an important aspect of the review of teaching and teaching performance. "Faculty must be continually engaged in discussing teaching in order both to nurture new teachers into the community of teacher-scholars and to render the process of making personnel decisions (who gets hired, who gets tenured, who gets merit pay, and the like) more open and more informed by reasoned decisions that consider teaching seriously. The idea is then in the spirit of both continuous quality improvement and the practice of self-regulation within professions" (Van Note Chism, 1999, p. 6). Peer evaluation of teaching can be both formative and summative. Peer evaluators of teaching are expected to share feedback to improve teaching (formative) and to provide an evaluation of teaching for use in administrative or collegial decisions (summative). This document will focus on summative peer evaluations.

a) Formative Evaluation

Information gathered from the proper evaluation of teaching may be used for formative purposes to assist with instructional development and improvement. A more developmental approach to evaluation involves “faculty members creating teaching portfolios, dossiers, and self-evaluations that describe teaching strengths and accomplishments while participating in faculty development programs” (Redmon, 1999). Informal formative peer evaluations and comments from classroom observations can assist faculty in their development as teachers. Formative techniques of evaluation can also help teachers assess their success with trying new teaching approaches or techniques in the classroom. A formative evaluation process “describes activities that are to provide teachers with information that they can use to improve their teaching. The information is intended for their personal uses rather than for public inspection . . . The information should be rich in detail so that teachers can obtain clear insights on the nature of their teaching strengths and weaknesses” (Van Note Chism, 1999, p. 3.). Formative peer evaluations may include video-taping lectures and reviewing them with a more experienced teacher to determine ways to improve in the classroom. Another example of formative peer evaluation may include working with small groups of teachers or with a mentor to share information and insight on teaching. There can be great value from the interaction between teacher and reviewer as the reviewer can also learn through the process. Departments and colleges are encouraged to support this experiential approach to instructional development.

b) Summative Evaluation

For summative purposes, evaluation of teaching is associated with collegial decision-making processes including tenure, promotion and salary review, right of first refusal and for review of academic programs. “Summative evaluation of teaching focuses on information needed to make a personnel decision . . . Consequently, the information is for public inspection . . . it is often more general and comparative in nature than data for formative evaluation” (Van Note Chism, 1999, p. 3). Most universities advocate that peer evaluations form an essential part of the evidence to assess a candidate's teaching effectiveness (Yon, Burnap and Kohut, 1999).

Summative peer evaluation can include formative aspects although the primary purpose shall be to provide evidence for career decision points. The formative aspects of peer evaluation can include the meeting between the teacher and reviewer to discuss the evaluation process. Another formative portion of peer evaluation is the written assessment following the completion of the review that should be shared with the teacher. Alternatively, we recommend that the department head or dean meet with the candidate to advise them of the outcome and share suggestions on ways to improve teaching. In most evaluation processes, the sharing of outcomes with participants completes the feedback loop and forms an important part of the learning process for all concerned.

Assessment of teaching performance should be based on a series of evaluations of a candidate's teaching performance and teaching materials over a period of time. The peer evaluation will consider all aspects of teaching and evidence of performance. Peer evaluations should be obtained on an ongoing basis.

Role of Evaluation Reviewers

For the purpose of peer evaluation, the peer reviewers should be based in the same department or non-departmentalized college, wherever possible, as the teacher being evaluated. Peer reviewers need not be content experts. It is recommended that reviewers be tenured department or college members or associate members whose rank is equivalent to or higher than the candidate's.

“Reviewers should make sure that they are appropriate judges. If there are conflicts of interest, . . . personality conflicts between the reviewer and the colleague being reviewed, . . . or if there are other compelling reasons why the reviewer cannot do a thorough and fair job, that reviewer should request to be excused from the review “ (Van Note Chism, 1999, p. 33). The teacher being reviewed should also identify potential conflicts of interest. Reasonableness and common sense should prevail in such matters.

Departments, colleges or relevant teaching committees should adapt guidelines relevant to their disciplines and the circumstances of their department or college. Department or college guidelines should be provided to reviewers to ensure that they understand their roles and responsibilities. Training of peer reviewers is important especially for first time reviewers to ensure that the review process is understood, best practices are known and that fair and objective evaluations are produced. From time to time and upon request from colleges, the Gwenna Moss Teaching and Learning Centre will offer workshops on the peer evaluation of teaching. Peer review of teaching should be an integral part of the teaching activities of the departments and colleges.

The University appreciates the time commitment required to conduct a proper peer evaluation of teaching. For example, it may take one or two hours to review the course materials and examinations, to observe classroom teaching, a couple of hours to prepare a written report and time to meet and discuss the reviewer ‘s findings with the instructor. Evaluators are encouraged to list their work as part of their contribution to teaching activities on their respective c.v.'s and should be a part of the work listed in the update of their annual activities report. As with proper peer review of research activities, proper peer review of teaching is important to assess the activities of teachers and it should be valued accordingly. Departments and colleges are advised to recognize the contributions of peer evaluators when assigning duties and when rewarding meritorious performance.

Frequency

It is important that evaluations be conducted serially so as to provide a reasonable sampling of evidence over a time period. It is recommended that one course per year be evaluated by a peer for each teacher in a probationary appointment. As a minimum, there should be no fewer than four peer evaluations for over a six-year probationary period. Departments and colleges should determine the frequency of evaluations for those who have achieved tenure, permanent or continuing status and those who have been promoted to the highest faculty rank at the University but it is recommended that such evaluations occur every three years after achieving tenure or promotion to full professor. Peer evaluations within the final three years of appointment preceding retirement will be conducted at the request of the teacher. While the frequency of peer evaluations may seem onerous, it is important to provide good information for teachers so they can improve as teachers by making them accountable for their teaching performance and methods.

The timing of the peer review is also important. Peer reviews should not be conducted in the first two weeks or last two weeks of a course offering.

If these practices cannot be adopted, a written explanation of the reasons for not conducting multiple observations and multi-level assessments shall be provided for the record.

Sessional lecturers will not be subject to peer evaluations except as required by the formal teaching assessments set out in their Collective Agreement.

Criteria for Peer Evaluation

Before the peer review is conducted, the reviewer and the reviewee should discuss the process and understand their respective roles in the review in accordance with the relevant standards and institutional, college and departmental policies.

For best practice, it is recommended that information on the candidate's teaching be gathered from two different people before a major decision is made. It is suggested that each reviewer should observe classroom performance on two different occasions for each evaluation. Over time, it is also preferred if information is gathered on teaching at various course levels.

The appendices provide guidance about the dimensions and factors that might be considered for a peer review of teaching. Academic units should review the University Standards for Promotion and Tenure on teaching ability and performance and in particular Table II - Evaluation of Teaching. The Table identifies teaching roles, aspects to be assessed and items and activities to be reviewed. Peer evaluation should embrace the various aspects of teaching including the criteria listed below. All peer evaluations will culminate in a written assessment. As a minimum, criteria to be evaluated should include:

1. review of classroom performance
2. quality of examinations
3. course outlines and course materials
4. syllabi
5. reading materials
6. reading lists
7. laboratory manuals
8. workbooks
9. classroom assignments.

Sample questions and processes on the criteria are provided in the appendices. Conclusions should be based on evidence from documentation that has been provided and knowledge supported by a review of materials and classroom performance. The review should be comprehensive and comparative and focus on overall performance. "The review should culminate in a written summary that is thorough, grounded in evidence, and clear in its conclusions" (Van Note Chism, 1999, p. 34). A best practice is to ensure that the outcomes of the peer evaluation are shared with the teacher. This can be done in writing by the reviewer or by discussions with the reviewer or the department head or dean. Information gathered from peer evaluations (and evaluations from students) may form part of the information used by a

department head or dean when advising candidates on their career progress. The advice can be formative and provide guidance on what is required to improve teaching effectiveness.

Departments and colleges that currently have peer evaluation processes or instruments are encouraged to review them to ensure they incorporate best practices and meet standard criteria for peer evaluation of teaching. Four examples of instruments used for peer evaluation are appended. Departments and colleges that do not currently have instruments in place to guide evaluators are asked to consider adopting one of these instruments or to develop their own to meet their needs. The weight given to such evaluations should also be discussed by the academic unit and consideration given to the variety of information gathered on teaching (peer, student and self-evaluation). Departments and colleges should also consider the weight given to peer evaluations early in the career of a teacher as compared to those given closer to career decision points and later in their careers; teachers must be given the opportunity to improve their teaching over the course of their academic career and should be encouraged to be innovative and effective in the classroom.

Eileen Herteis, Programme Director for the Gwenna Moss Teaching and Learning Centre, has compiled a listing of on-line and print resources to assist departments and colleges with the peer review process:

Online Resources

Indiana State University. (1998). [Report of the Task Force on Assessing and Improving Teaching & Learning](#)

University of Texas at Austin (no date). [Preparing for Peer Observation: A Guidebook](#) .

Print Resources

Arreola, R. (1995). [Developing a comprehensive faculty evaluation system](#). Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing.

Cohen, P and McKeachie, W. (1980). "The role of colleagues in the evaluation of university teaching. [Improving College and University Teaching](#): 28, 147-54.

Glassick, C.E., Huber, M. T. and Maerof, G.I. (1997). [Scholarship assessed: Evaluation of the professoriate](#). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Seldin, P. (1984). [Changing practices in faculty evaluation](#). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Weimer, M. (1991). "Guidelines for classroom observation. " [Improving college & university teaching: Strategies for effectiveness](#). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Departments and colleges are encouraged to seek out additional resources and materials to assist them with the development of their peer evaluation processes. The source book on peer review of teaching written by Nancy Van Note Chism that is cited in the reference section of this Framework is an excellent resource.

Next Steps

This Framework does not address peer review of clinical teaching, courses in performing and studio arts or those taught by teams. There are gaps in these areas at other institutions. It is intended that the appropriate academic units will develop peer review processes in these areas.

To the extent possible, modified peer review processes should be consistent with this Framework and the Principles of the Evaluation of Teaching at the University of Saskatchewan.

For examples of peer evaluation forms, see pdf document at the top of this page.

References

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