Provost Guidelines for Evaluation of Teaching at Purdue University

Purdue is committed to continuously enhancing and improving all aspects of our teaching mission. As part of this commitment, the university has embraced mandatory, campus-wide evaluation of teaching (1,2) for more than 20 years. In 2017, the University Senate passed a resolution that addressed on-line student evaluations of teaching (3), requesting that the Provost re-visit the current teaching evaluation requirements and system. The Provost convened a Teaching Evaluation Task Force (TETF) that explored the issue of evaluating teaching from a variety of perspectives and approaches (4). In response to these efforts, the following guidelines are adopted effective August 17, 2020:

On-line student evaluations. The language from the 1998 Senate action is updated to now require 10 common questions that have been designed and tested to provide meaningful, actionable information about the quality of teaching with minimal personal bias (4). The previous very general "two questions" about the instructor and course that were addressed in University Senate resolution 16-05 (3) are no longer mandatory and their use for promotion and tenure evaluations or in consideration for awards and other recognition is discouraged (recognizing that these data may be the only historical evaluation of teaching available). Units and instructors may add up to five additional questions beyond the 10 common questions, a number of which were suggested in the TETF report, but the upper limit is 15 total questions (see Appendix 1, below, for the question sets). Such questions will follow the 10 common questions on the evaluation. Mid-semester evaluations for formative purposes will be made available to instructors and their use is strongly encouraged. Faculty should have access to professional assistance in interpreting their evaluations (through the Center for Instructional Excellence, for example) if desired. A number of mechanisms, now widely tested, will be used to improve the student response rates and the usefulness of student written responses (4-5; Appendix 2, below). These 10 common questions will be assessed on a regular basis for any form of bias that might be present.

Peer evaluations. The TETF concurs with the 1997 report on the value of peer assessments of teaching effectiveness. Peer assessment of teaching is recommended, which can include peer evaluation of course materials, and carefully executed classroom visitations by trained evaluators. Guidelines and best practices for effective peer evaluation should be made available and used. (Some units have already composed guidance for peer evaluators (6).) Self-evaluation as a source of evidence for teaching effectiveness also has value.

Teaching portfolios. There is also value for some faculty or units in the development of teaching portfolios, which record in appropriate detail all the work product that an instructor has created, along with feedback. These are comprehensive documents, generated by the instructor, and can be used as a source of information for rich evaluation of teaching. Specific ideas for the format of a teaching portfolio are presented in the TETF report (4).

Use of evaluations in promotion decisions. Current university criteria for promotion and tenure (7) specify that the evaluation of teaching for purposes of promotion must be holistic, placed into context, and in particular not rely exclusively on a single factor, such as scores from on-line student evaluations. Thus, the assessment of teaching for promotion and tenure must include multiple forms of evaluation drawing on the evaluation of teaching by students and faculty peers, the examination of teaching portfolios, or other evidence of teaching performance. In addition, demonstrated effort and success to *improve* teaching using formative evaluation, mentor advice, or other resources should be considered positively in evaluating teaching for promotion decisions, as

should teaching innovation and teaching-related mentoring of students. The manner in which these many teaching-related factors and activities will be used for promotion decisions in a unit must be made clear to its faculty.

Summary. Faculty and their units are reminded that the university has in place, in existing guidelines (1) and promotion and tenure criteria (7), the elements of holistic reviews of teaching and the imperative to carry them out. All units are now challenged to fulfill these responsibilities by developing (where necessary) and rigorously applying holistic reviews of teaching for promotion and tenure and other evaluation purposes. These should include evidence such as on-line student evaluations, peer review, or other forms of teaching assessment and evaluation, and must be informed and enriched by the full range of each faculty member's teaching output. Formative evaluations of faculty as a basis for teaching improvement will also be supported and encouraged. Such efforts toward improvement, along with teaching innovations and student mentoring, will also be important considerations in assessing teaching performance for purposes of promotion and other evaluation. Finally, new developments in evaluating teaching and promoting teaching excellence that arise among our peer institutions will be monitored in the spirt of continuous improvement.

(1)   A Proposal for Evaluation of Teaching at Purdue University: A Component of an Overall Learning Assessment Initiative (Report of the Teaching Evaluation Committee). 1997.

(2)   University Senate Document 97-9 (revised). Amended and approved 27 April 1998.

(3)   University Senate Document 16-05. Amended 20 February 2017.

(4)   Report of the Teaching Evaluation Task Force, 2019.

(5)   Peterson, D.A.M., L.A. Biederman, D. Anderson, T.M. Ditonto, K. Roe, "Mitigating Gender Bias in Student Evaluations of Teaching. *PLoS ONE*, 14(5), May 15, 2019. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0216241

(6)   *e.g.*, Process for Peer Review of Teaching for the Department of Agricultural Economics, 2006

(7)   Criteria for Tenure and Promotion for the West Lafayette Campus: https://www.purdue.edu/provost/faculty/promotionandtenure.html

Appendix 1 – Questions for Student On-line Teaching Evaluations

Common question set. The following set of questions for end-of-semester course and instructor evaluation will be common across all evaluations. These questions are slightly modified from the questions used at Texas A&M University. Texas A&M has studied the responses to these questions and reported minimal gender bias[1].

1. *The class activities are well prepared and organized.*
2. *The assignments aid me in achieving the class objectives.*
3. *The projects or laboratories aid me in achieving the class objectives [where relevant]*
4. *The examinations aid me in achieving the class objectives. [where relevant]*
5. *The instructor clearly explains material so that I can understand it.*
6. *The instructor is open to my questions and effectively answers them.*
7. *The instructor seems to care that I learned this material.*
8. *The instructor willingly makes time to help me.*
9. *The instructor is fair and consistent in evaluating my performance in the course.*
10. *The instructor created a welcoming and inclusive classroom environment.*

Question set responses:
1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree

These questions address the following areas:

1. Class preparation	7. Academic concern
2.-4. Assignments, labs, projects, and examinations	8. Availability
5. Communication	9. Fairness in grading
6. Responsiveness	10. Environment

Optional questions. Additional questions may be added at the option of the unit/the instructor. While units are encouraged to consider these optional questions, and perhaps others of their own design, no more than 15 questions should be used on an end of semester student evaluation.

1. *My instructor provides me choices and options.*
2. *I feel understood by my instructor.*
3. *My instructor conveys confidence in my ability to do well in the course.*
4. *My instructor encourages me to ask questions.*
5. *My instructor listens to how I would like to do things.*
6. *My instructor tries to understand how I see things before suggesting a new way to do things.*
7. *The instructor challenges me to do my best work.*
8. *I understand what is expected of me in this course.*
9. *The text for this course is helpful to me in learning the course material.*
10. *The course web page is organized to promote my success in this course.*
11. *The instructor returns assignments in a timely manner.*

Question set responses:

1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree

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[1] Johnson, M.D., A. Narayanan, and W.J. Sawaya. "Effects of Course and Instructor Characteristics on Student Evaluation of Teaching Across a College of Engineering." *Journal of Engineering Education*. 102.2 (2013): 289-318.

Appendix 2 – Obtaining Useful Student Feedback

Improve the Quality and Usefulness of Student Feedback

1. Place an article on constructive, professional feedback each semester in the student government newsletter just before end of semester evaluations open.
2. Include an activity as part of a first-year experience in each college to emphasize the nature and importance of constructive, professional feedback on teaching.
3. Discuss, in appropriate first year (or other) courses, student feedback on evaluations.
4. In their classroom, instructors should discuss specifically the importance of evaluations, and what type of feedback is useful in improving the course.
5. Develop a webpage on constructive student feedback (Student Tips for Evaluations) and place a link on the student course-instructor evaluation web page to this information. Student and faculty representatives should partner with the developers and the Center for Instructional Excellence (CIE) to provide feedback about website content and layout before it is released. Publicity about the website and its purpose should be disseminated through *Purdue Today*, social media and other appropriate means as a way to reach faculty, staff, and students in a timely manner.

Improve Student Response Rates

1. An instructors' page on the teaching evaluation web-site should provide tips on improving student response rates such as: telling students their honest and constructive feedback is valued and how it is used to improve the course; telling students who the audiences are for the feedback (the faculty member, mentors, etc.); discussing the results of a recent CIE study on student response rates to end-of-course evaluations that provides data driven methods for improving them; and designating time in class for students to compete evaluations; among other approaches.
2. Describe the end-of-semester course-instructor evaluations in the course syllabus.

Reducing Bias in Student Responses

1. Include the following statement in the instructions to students providing on-line evaluation:
   - Student evaluations of teaching play an important role in the review of instructors. Your opinions are part of the review of instructors that takes place every year. Purdue University recognizes that student evaluations of teaching can be influenced by students' unconscious and unintentional biases about the race and gender of the instructor. As you fill out the course evaluation, please keep this in mind and focus on your experience with the course (what you learned, the assignments, the in-class material) and not unrelated matters (the instructor's race or gender).