

Framework for Teaching Excellence

Background

Teaching excellence is crucial to fostering student learning in institutions of higher education. At Purdue University, we developed a definition of teaching excellence with a framework that encompasses various attributes of excellent university instructors and provides tools that can be used to evaluate the defined attributes.

The *Framework for Teaching Excellence* below is contextually-grounded to encompass elements and descriptors of excellent Purdue University instructors (Figure 1: summary framework; Figure 2: expanded framework). In this *Framework*, excellent teachers create an environment and adopt pedagogies that allow students to meet learning outcomes and achieve their full potential as learners. All instructors strive for excellence as *Exemplars*, *Enthusiasts*, and *Educators*. Instructors whose research encompasses teaching and learning should additionally strive for excellence as *Experimenters* and *Explorers*.

Through current and future actions, this framework provides a catalyst for a campus cultural shift toward the equitable valuation of teaching excellence at a research-intensive university.

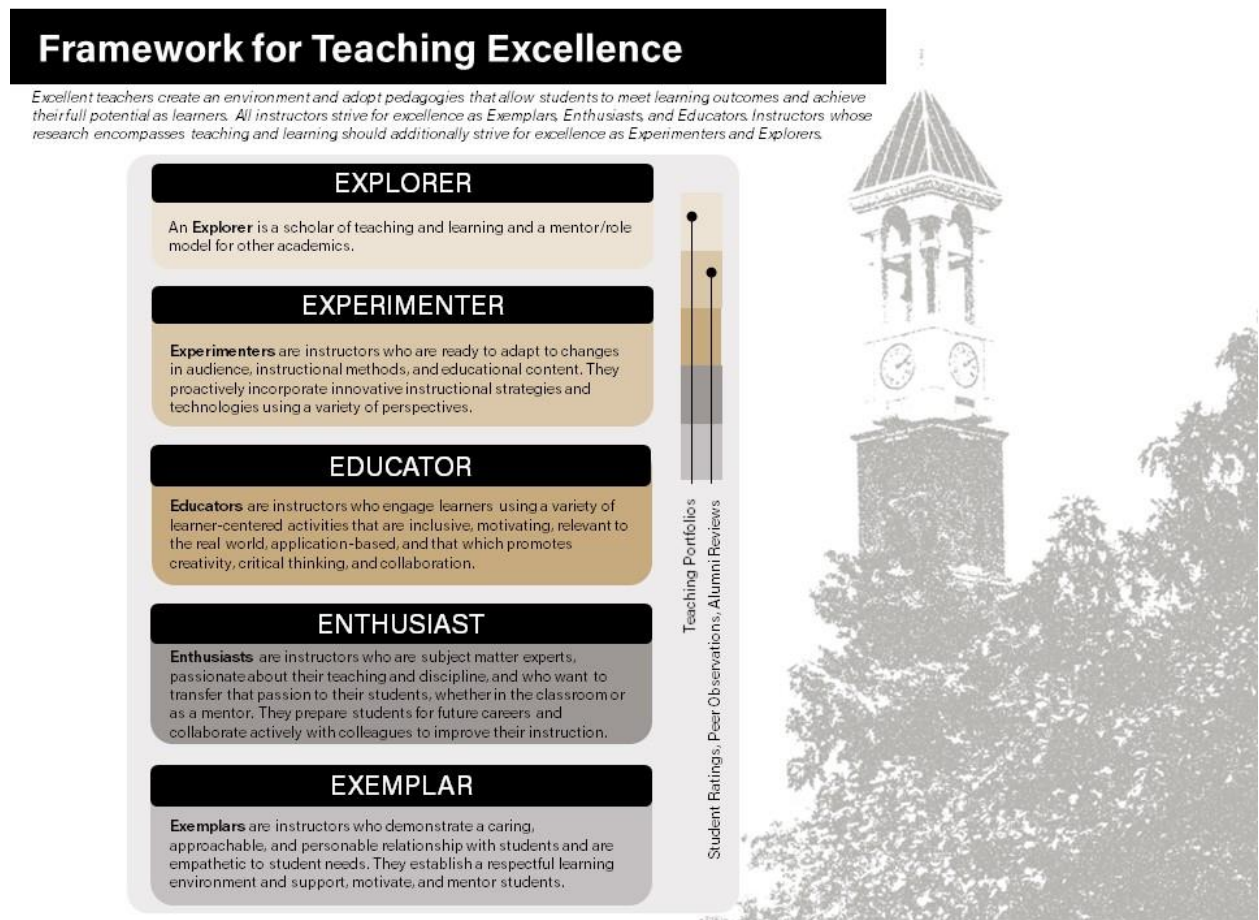


Figure 1: Framework for Teaching Excellence (summary)

Framework for Teaching Excellence

Excellent teachers create an environment and adopt pedagogies that allow students to meet learning outcomes and achieve their full potential as learners. All instructors strive for excellence as Exemplars, Enthusiasts, and Educators. Instructors whose research encompasses teaching and learning should additionally strive for excellence as Experimenters and Explorers.

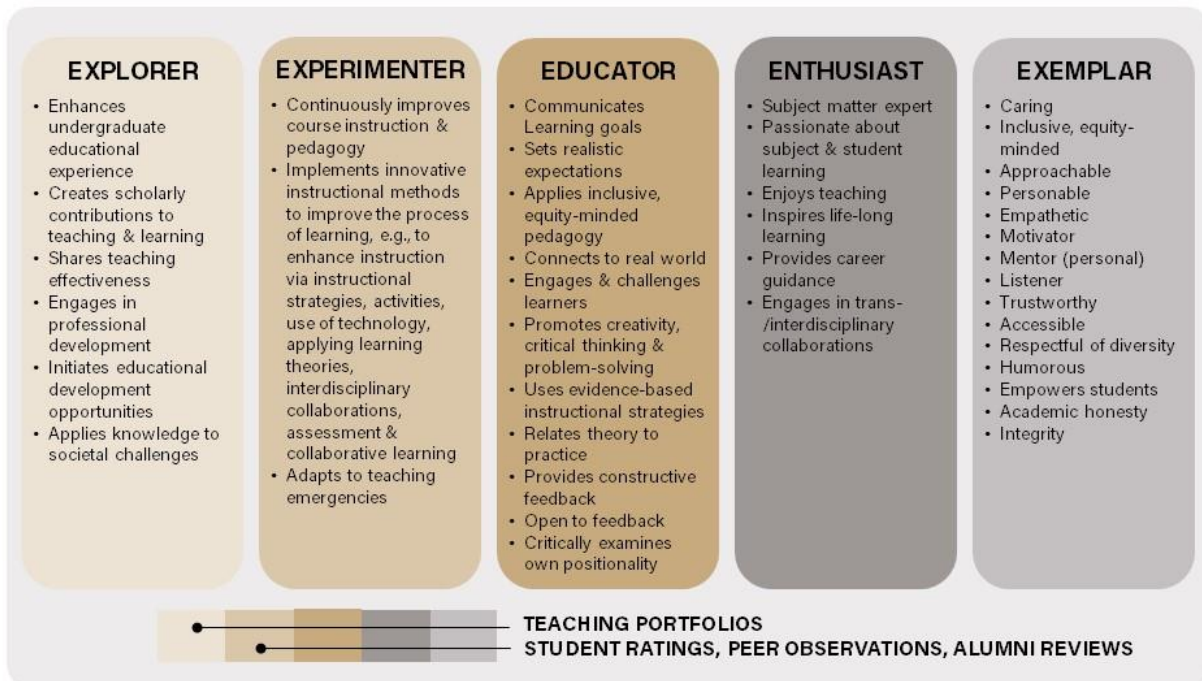


Figure 2: Framework for Teaching Excellence (expanded)

Call to Action

In 2019, as part of the Road Map for Transformative Undergraduate Education, Provost Akridge charged the Teaching Academy with defining teaching excellence and creating a cultural shift such that teaching excellence is understood, supported, and valued across campus. The Teaching Academy was asked to:

...tackle the question of what do we mean by excellent teaching, and to suggest desired outcomes. We will provide the necessary training, rewards, support structures, and measures of accountability to ensure that all students benefit from excellent teaching across their entire Purdue experience.

--Road Map for Transformative Undergraduate Education, 2019

The Study

The Teaching Academy accepted the charge, beginning with a deliberate research process to define teaching excellence at Purdue and determine how to document, evaluate, and recognize it. The study resulted in a framework for Teaching Excellence at Purdue University West Lafayette that was not only grounded in scholarly literature, but also based upon Purdue-centric perceptions of teaching excellence.

Data Collection

To create a cultural shift on a university campus requires buy-in and adoption from multiple stakeholders. The process for putting into operation unpacking such a culturally appropriate framework must include critical decisions around who gets to define teaching excellence and how stakeholders are integrated in the process. Thus, the research team collected data from subunits within Purdue University, including faculty,

staff, students and the university administration. Additionally, the researchers reviewed digital artifacts relevant to the *Roadmap for Transformative Undergraduate Education Initiative*, including transcriptions of in-person interviews, observation notes from several listening sessions, and student reflections. Furthermore, survey data collected by the Center for Instructional Excellence informed the study.

- University administration was represented by the Undergraduate Academic Associate Deans.
- Instructors were represented by tenure and non-tenure track faculty, assistant professors, associate professors, full professors, clinical faculty, and lecturers. This included voices of faculty selected for the 150th Anniversary Professorships, Faculty Senate members, instructors who taught using a variety of modalities (i.e., large course instruction, online instruction, active learning, service-learning), and instructors belonging to underrepresented minority groups.
- Purdue students were represented by Honors College undergraduate students who were part of a course investigating what it means to be an excellent teacher, as well as undergraduate underrepresented minority students belonging to a student advisory group.
- Staff members who contributed to the study included those who were part of the Teaching Evaluation task force and staff reporting to the Senior Vice Provost for Teaching and Learning, Vice Provost for Enrollment Management and the Vice Provost for Student Life.
- Participants also included faculty and staff who work in other areas that serve the entire campus, such as Diversity & Inclusion, the Honors College, the technology support departments, and the university libraries.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data, the researchers used content analysis allowing for the systematic transformation of a large amount of data into a concise summary of key results. The emergent themes from this analysis provided elements and descriptors of teaching excellence, as well as suggested tools for evaluating it. Lastly, the scholarly literature, survey data from the Center for Instructional Excellence, and external university websites were used to check for consistency with the study findings. The entire timeline for data collection, data analysis, and consistency checks is provided below (Figure 3).

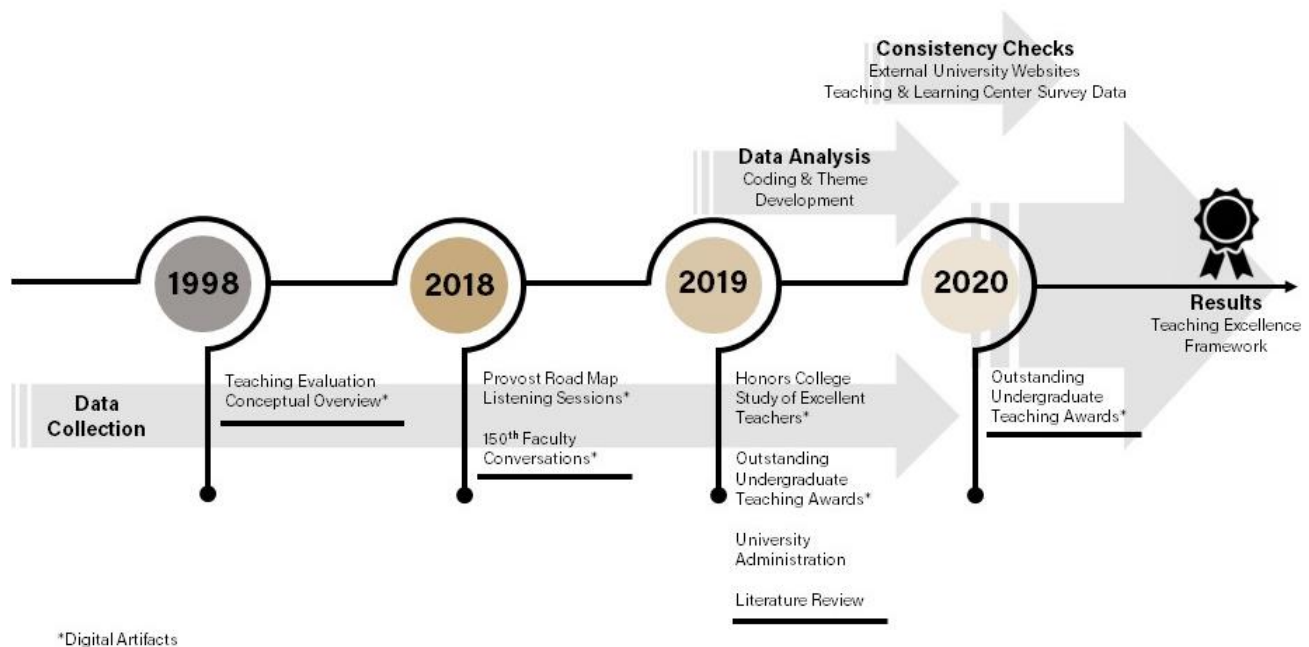


Figure 3: Research timeline

This process led to a framework that describes the elements of teaching excellence at Purdue, descriptors for each element, and tools for holistic evaluation. While the results of this study led to a definitional framework for teaching excellence and a suite of suggested evaluation tools, additional informal conversations at the university surrounding diversity, inclusion and equity, and lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic expanded this framework. Furthermore, careful consideration was given to the initial charge from the Provost, i.e., to *create a cultural shift such that teaching excellence is understood, supported and valued across campus*. The final *Framework for Teaching Excellence* provides a developmental model of progression for teaching excellence.

Next Steps

The Provost's charge in 2019 was not only to define teaching excellence, but also to create a cultural shift across the West Lafayette campus. To that end, the Teaching Academy leadership received funds from the provost to establish a Teaching Academy Fellow and a Teaching Excellence Advisory committee with representation from across the university (see Appendix A).

This team is meeting with focus groups to disseminate the definition of teaching excellence and to collect information about best practices for putting the definition into action, both in local units and campus-wide. Focus groups are asked to consider three key questions:

- What resources do Purdue instructors need to develop teaching excellence?
- How can excellence across the five elements of the definition be documented equitably and rigorously at Purdue?
- How will Purdue's institutions of hiring, promotion, tenure, and merit review use such documentation to reward excellent teaching?

One tool that has emerged repeatedly from the research and from university feedback is the use of a teaching portfolio for documenting teaching experiences, activities, and evidence of teaching excellence. The Center for Instructional Excellence will begin offering workshops on teaching portfolios keyed to this framework for teaching excellence in spring 2022.

The Teaching Academy Executive Council endorsed the framework in November, 2021. The full membership will vote on the framework in AY 21-22, and the framework is also being considered by the Educational Policy Committee and Faculty Affairs Committee of the University Senate.

If you have responses to the three key questions or other information or feedback to offer, please contact Kristina Bross (bross@purdue.edu).

Appendix A: Teaching Excellence Advisory Committee

Natasha Duncan, Clinical Associate Professor, Honors College

Marcos Fernandez, Professor, Agriculture

Jen Hall, Senior Lecturer, Liberal Arts

Heather Howard, Associate Professor, Libraries

Rachael Kenney, Associate Professor, Education

Dave Nelson, Associate Director, Center for Instructional Excellence

Larry Nies, Professor, Engineering

Kathy Salisbury, 150th Anniversary Professor, Veterinary Medicine (VET)

Greg Strimel, Assistant Professor, Purdue Polytechnic Institute

Charlene Sullivan, Associate Professor, Krannert

Sandra Sydnor, Associate Professor, Health and Human Sciences

Marcy Towns, Professor, Science

Zach Weber, Clinical Associate Professor, Pharmacy

Kris Bross, Teaching Academy Teaching Excellence Fellow, Professor, Honors College, *Ex Officio*

Kim Illingworth, Teaching Academy Chair, Associate Professor, Pharmacy, *Ex Officio*

Lindsey Payne, Past Teaching Academy Chair, Assistant Professor of Practice, Engineering, *Ex Officio*

Signe Kastberg, Committee Chair Senate Faculty Affairs, Professor, Education, *Ex Officio*