Policies for Evaluating Faculty: Recommendations for
Incorporating Student and Peer Reviews in the Faculty Evaluation Process

Overview

Effective teaching is the core of any outstanding university and is very important at every institution in The University of Texas System. UT System invests significant resources in rewarding outstanding teaching, and effective teaching is a requirement for the promotion and tenure of every faculty member. The System campuses have centers which support good teaching, and many departments work collegially to improve and augment the development of teaching within specific programs. Thus, it is entirely appropriate that excellence in teaching serves as an important foundation for a System-wide task force of faculty members and students.

Task Force Background

In 2011, The University of Texas System Chancellor unveiled his Framework for Advancing Excellence. The Framework is an action plan to implement and measure the effectiveness of nine overarching goals aimed at advancing UT institutions. Included among the Framework goals is an item addressing faculty excellence, specifically, to strengthen performance evaluations. The Chancellor appointed two task forces in 2012 to recommend ways to address this strategy.

The **Task Force on the Evaluation of Faculty Teaching** was charged to:

1. Identify an appropriate, consistent, and limited set of faculty teaching evaluation questions that can be administered System-wide;

2. Recommend a process consistent across all campuses that incorporates the critical questions which evaluate faculty teaching at the end of the semester; and

3. Identify mechanisms to provide faculty feedback throughout the semester.

The **Task Force on Faculty Peer Observations of Teaching** was charged to develop a policy that every academic campus could adopt regarding faculty peer evaluations, including guidelines for implementation and a template form.

In February 2013, a work group was organized to review the recommendations of both task forces and develop a set of instructions for campuses to follow to implement the recommendations. This document provides the guidelines developed by the work group and approved by the Chancellor. Each campus is expected to incorporate these items into their policies addressing faculty evaluations and begin applying the student evaluations policies in Fall 2013 and the faculty peer review policies in Fall 2014 or earlier.

Guidelines for Student Evaluations of Faculty

Task Force Background

Texas Education Code Section 51.974 requires institutions of higher education to conduct end-of-course faculty evaluations and make the evaluations available on the institution's website. Most universities have accommodated this request by providing summary responses to a general overall evaluation question. The UT System would like to expand beyond the overall question, but maintain consistency across campuses.

In Spring 2012, a task force was created to identify a consistent method of evaluating faculty teaching across the UT System. The Task Force on the Evaluation of Faculty Teaching consisted of representatives from across the UT System, including students and faculty from academic and health institutions. The group met regularly throughout the spring and summer to identify a common set of evaluation questions, recommend an evaluation process, and identify mechanisms for providing continuous feedback between faculty and students. Based on the recommendations presented in the task force report, the following information is provided to assist institutions in complying with the new requirements affecting student evaluations of faculty teaching.
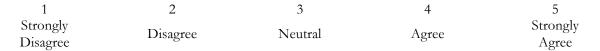
General Points

- For the purposes of student evaluations, faculty members are defined as the courses' *instructors of record*. Faculty members deliver the curriculum and are identified by the campus as the courses' responsible parties.

- Confidentiality of student evaluations of faculty teaching must be protected, and it is important that the methods used to maintain confidentiality are clearly demonstrated to students. Evaluations will not be administered for any class containing fewer than five people, as of the day after the final university drop date. If a class contains five or more students, but fewer than five completed the evaluations, the evaluation data will be utilized.

Mandatory Survey Questions
Each campus will incorporate the following five questions in every end-of-course student evaluation survey. The questions should be the first five questions of every end-of-course evaluation. The questions must be in this specific order with this specific wording:

1. The instructor clearly defined and explained the course objectives and expectations.
2. The instructor was prepared for each instructional activity.
3. The instructor communicated information effectively.
4. The instructor encouraged me to take an active role in my own learning.
5. The instructor was available to students either electronically or in person.

The response scale for each question should appear as follows:

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

All five questions should be considered mandatory. Any additional questions, specific to each institution, college, department, or faculty member may follow. Institutions should consider that long surveys typically lead to lower response rates and less accurate responses.

<u>Encouraging Student Participation</u>
Student participation is crucial, as survey results are used in the formal evaluation of faculty. Students need to understand that their responses can also help instructors improve teaching styles and course materials. To incentivize student participation, institutions are encouraged to withhold a student's access to grades until the student completes all course evaluations. Mandatory completion of course evaluations is not new – most UT health institutions already have such a system in place. Understanding that mandatory course evaluations will require a cultural shift on most campuses, the following suggestions may help to encourage acceptance and participation:

- Encourage faculty to inform students of the importance of completing course evaluations. **Students have indicated repeatedly that the faculty member's emphasis on the importance of completing evaluations is the most compelling reason for compliance.**

- Encourage faculty members to note on the course syllabus that course evaluations are required.

- Encourage faculty members to allow class time to complete the evaluations. Make students aware of this time allocation in advance, so that they may bring phones, tablets, laptops, etc. in order to comply. Reserve a computer room, even for a portion of the class time, to encourage compliance.

- Consider applying an incentive at the course level.

- Consider having the President, Provost, or VP for Student Affairs send a memo or email communication to all students towards the end of each semester informing them of the importance of course evaluations. Remind students that course evaluations enhance academic excellence, impact faculty's professional development, and affect faculty's overall evaluations at the institutional level.

- Collaborate with campus student governments in promoting the importance of completing course evaluations. Student government promotional campaigns aid student understanding of the goals and the process of course evaluations. Ultimately, this awareness helps to increase student participation and acceptance.

- Accentuate completion as a positive: Indicate that students that complete course evaluations by a certain date will have *priority access to grades*. One institution currently locks its online grading system two weeks before finals, allowing *priority access* one week after finals and releasing grades to all students one week later. These timeframes can be adjusted based on the campus processes.

<u>Electronic Course Evaluations</u>
We strongly recommend institutions to utilize an online system for course evaluations. An online system is more economical and sustainable than a paper-based system, providing quicker results and offering greater ability to perform data analytics. It is often the case that the response rates to online course evaluations are lower than those of paper-based evaluations, but the suggestions listed above will encourage student participation and help to improve online response rates. The UT System administration will collect the responses to the five required survey questions and an online system will allow the sharing of data in a more efficient manner. The recommendations for encouraging student participation are particularly important if an online system is used to administer course evaluations.

<u>Timeframe</u>
Each campus is expected to incorporate these five questions into their student evaluations for the **Fall 2013 semester**.

<u>Online Student Comments</u>
Student comments are not required and should not be forwarded to UT System. A faculty member may want to gather comments from his or her class, but the institution should develop policies and procedures to oversee this feedback. In developing these processes, institutions should be clear to students that providing in-class comments to an instructor is separate from the course evaluation.

<u>Continuous Feedback</u>
A survey of past recipients of The University of Texas System Regents Outstanding Teaching Awards revealed that systematic and frequent faculty-student feedback should be regarded as an integral component of every course. Students should receive feedback from professors and have many opportunities to provide feedback to faculty. Institutions are encouraged to use available continuous feedback mechanisms and MyEdu is developing the functionality to accommodate continuous feedback.

Guidelines for Faculty Peer Review of Teaching

<u>Task Force Background</u>

In spring 2012, a task force was created to identify effective ways to conduct faculty peer reviews. Faculty and administrators from select UT System academic institutions met in June 2012 to research and create a report on best practices. The Task Force on Faculty Peer Observations of Teaching noted in its report that a number of UT System institutions already have peer review policies in place, but there is wide variation across and within institutions. Emphasizing the importance of peer review in improving teaching, the task force focused it recommendations on guiding principles and minimum requirements for ensuring that peer observations are simple, yet constructive tools that should be used to improve instruction.

Peer evaluations are a mechanism for constructive feedback and continuous improvement. Institutions are required to implement a peer review system as part of a comprehensive effort for enhancing the teaching mission and continuous improvement. Based on the principles and recommendations presented in the task force report, the following standards are provided to assist institutions in the implementation of peer reviews of faculty teaching.

There are two purposes for using peer review: 1) for evaluation purposes (only in tenure and promotion cases) and 2) for improving teaching.

<u>Conducting Peer Reviews for Promotion and Tenure</u>
Each campus should develop a policy requiring peer review of faculty members, utilizing peer observations, as part of the institution's promotion and tenure process. Institutions must determine whether a modification to existing peer review policies or a new policy is necessary. All promotion and tenure review reports sent to UT System must show evidence of peer evaluations of teaching.

With extensive consultation from faculty members, each unit (college, school, or department) should develop its own system for peer review, appropriate to the subject being taught and the method of course delivery. This process should include the frequency and format options for peer observations and timelines which accommodate the promotion and tenure process. In addition, these academic units should define "peer" for their purposes and determine whether a peer can be of higher, equal, or lower rank and/or drawn from different departments. Observations by learning experts who are not faculty are valuable, particularly during the early stages of faculty development – but these should supplement, not substitute for, peer observations.

<u>Peer Review to Improving Teaching</u>
The quality of teaching should be of paramount importance to all faculty. Peer reviews are especially useful when used to improve faculty teaching. Understanding that even the best instructors can benefit from constructive feedback, each evaluation report should include comments on what the instructor does well and suggested areas for improvement. Peer review reports that are added to an instructor's record should include a list of observations conducted (with course, observer, and date), but not the content of the report unless released by the instructor. Instructors can be asked to supply for their records a narrative covering what they have learned from the observation process. Given the time commitment that must be assumed, department heads/chairs and faculty within a specific unit shall develop policy and procedures as to how often and by whom this process can be implemented.

<u>Timeframe</u>
Each campus is expected to have a peer review process in place for the **Fall 2014 semester or earlier**.

<u>Minimum Requirements for Peer Review Reports</u>

Evaluations should include the use of short forms that merit careful attention by the reviewer. Questions on the forms should call for either a narrative response or a choice among three or four responses. For example, a choice between *observed, needs improvement, not observed* or *truly exemplary, done well, needs improvement, N/A*.

Each peer evaluation/observation report should include:
- Number and title of course observed;
- Date of report;
- Name and signature of observer;
- Date of pre-observation meeting between observer and instructor, at which the syllabus and assignments are reviewed, special instructor concerns are addressed, and a mutually agreed class and date are specified;
- Date of classroom observation;
- An instrument that reflects methods by which instructor engages students in active learning;
- Date of post-observation meeting of observer with instructor, at which the observation was discussed;
- Instructor's signature affirming that the discussions took place.

Training
Before peer evaluations are conducted on a campus, peer evaluators should be given detailed guidance and an opportunity for training. Evaluation templates should be used to guide the evaluator's observations of teaching.

Sample Template
The following sample peer observation forms can be found in the Appendix. These examples are provided to guide institutions as they develop their own peer observation forms.

Example A: Peer Observation for Formative Assessment of Teaching
This sample template was developed based on templates currently in use at The University of Texas at Austin, with input from faculty representatives serving on the Task Force on Faculty Peer Observations of Teaching.

Example B: Classroom Observation Form
This sample template was developed by the members of the Faculty Evaluation Implementation Work Group. It was adapted from an instrument currently used at the University of Minnesota, modified to include recommendations from the Task Force on Faculty Peer Observations of Teaching.

Example C: Online Course Review Rubric
This sample template was heavily influenced by a rubric used by the UT TeleCampus to evaluate online courses.

Appendix: Sample Templates

Example A: Peer Observation for Formative Assessment of Teaching

Example B: Classroom Observation Form

Example C: Online Course Review Rubric