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Teaching, Learning and Assessment Task Force Revised Report

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Teaching, Learning, and Assessment Task Force Revised Report

August 1, 2007
(a revision to the December 8, 2006 report)

Introduction

The faculty of the University of Connecticut is dedicated to excellence and to maintaining and improving its reputation as one of the leading universities in the nation in both teaching and research. Our university has outstanding researchers and teachers in all fields of study and many of our faculty have been recognized for excellence in research and/or teaching.

Effective teaching is a complex process that requires skills in many areas and our faculty excels in many different areas of teaching. Some professors are creative and inspirational lecturers who can engage and inspire hundreds of students in large lecture halls. Others are outstanding at leading small seminars and asking complex questions that inspire students to find answers. Some use technology effectively, while others are excellent teachers without technology. Some excel in helping their students improve their writing, while still others inspire students to do high-level research. Still others are superlative as advisors for honors theses or doctoral dissertations. Some are excellent in multiple areas.

Our task force unanimously acknowledged our belief that the best teachers at the University of Connecticut work continuously each year to both enhance and improve their teaching, but some of their efforts are not recognized, properly assessed, or rewarded. Perhaps this is because at a research university, research is regarded as our most important work and some faculty have come to believe that excellence in teaching is not as important as excellence in research. Expectations regarding research are clear at our university and multiple indicators can be used to measure research productivity, such as the quality and quantity of publications in one's field, grant funding, and conference proceedings and presentations. Such concrete indicators provide evidence for what it means to be a productive scholar and can be used as benchmarks in deciding merit, and promotion and tenure. Teaching, unlike research, does not have such benchmarks, and administrators too often are forced to rely on a single source, student evaluations of instructors, as the litmus test of effective instruction.

Current research and practice can inform our understanding of how students learn, and faculty deserve the opportunity to reflect upon their teaching practices and understand the value that the university places on this endeavor. As a result of discussions among faculty and administrators on ways to enhance teaching and to develop and document multiple indicators of effective teaching, Provost Peter Nicholls appointed a task force on Teaching, Learning, and Assessment in order to enhance a university culture that values excellence in research and teaching. In discussions over the course of a semester, our task force has discussed and debated important issues and agreed upon some core values that underlie this report.

- Teaching is an important part of our work at the University of Connecticut and good teaching should be celebrated and rewarded.
- Teaching involves multiple skills and levels of expertise, and assessment of good teaching should be multi-faceted.
- Excellence in teaching can be enhanced by availability of resources (such as high tech classrooms, more faculty, and professional development opportunities that provide faculty with different types of assistance to improve teaching) and resources must be allocated to enable our faculty to both improve and excel in teaching.

The Task Force on Teaching, Learning, and Assessment

The Task Force (see Appendix A for a list of the members of the task force) was charged by the provost with recommending ways to: 1) enhance the quality of teaching and learning at the undergraduate and graduate levels; 2) offer opportunities for professional development for faculty; 3) develop assessment tools to inform and improve classroom instruction; and 4) ensure that quality of teaching will be a strong consideration, along with research, in reappointment, promotion, tenure, and merit, as mandated in the by-laws.

The Task Force met during the 2006-2007 academic year to address its charge, and members considered and debated many ideas related to effective classroom practice. In the end, the Task Force prepared a report around three main areas: 1) enhancing the value of teaching; 2) opportunities for improving teaching; and 3) the evaluation of teaching. The report was accepted by the Provost and made available to the university community on the Teaching, Learning, and Assessment website (<http://www.tlataskforce.uconn.edu/>). The website provided administrators, faculty, and staff an opportunity to share their thoughts on the recommendations made by the Task Force. In addition, open forums were scheduled during March, 2007 for the purpose of discussing aspects of the report as well as an opportunity for university members to provide feedback on the report to Task Force members. (Please see Appendix G for the methods the task force used to receive feedback to the draft report.)

In May, 2007 a Teaching, Learning, and Assessment Oversight Committee was appointed (see Appendix B for committee members) and charged with analyzing the feedback in order to revise the original report and to oversee the implementation of the recommendations of the revised report. In carrying out its charge, in addition to the feedback from the university community, the oversight committee adhered to a set of core principles on effective teaching that were used in writing the revised report. They included: 1) research and teaching should be viewed as synergistic activities—each should inform the other; 2) instructors should strive to create classroom environments that respect and value student opinions; 3) instructors should have a deep understanding of their subject matter, a knowledge of learners and how they learn, an understanding of ways to engage students in the learning process, an understanding of appropriate assessment techniques, and an understanding of ways to use technology to enhance student learning and performance; 4) instructors should be engaged in ongoing reflective practice of their teaching.

The debate over the relationship of teaching and research at the University of Connecticut can and should continue. This revised report reflects the consensus about the need to address ways to support instructors in their teaching and to consider methods to evaluate teaching, both formative (for the instructor's benefit alone) and summative (for merit, PTR, etc.). The revised report is divided into three main sections with recommendations, as follows.

I. A High-Quality Teaching Environment

A great university not only advocates and discusses good teaching, but it also provides an environment that facilitates excellence in instruction.

Recommendation 1: Hire at least 175 new tenured and tenure-track faculty (and the complementary support staff) in order to bring our student-faculty ratio to 15:1, as at our peer institutions. Overly large classes, bulging majors, and the other stresses of increased enrollment can promote neither good teaching nor good research. Although this report focuses on classroom instruction, many other aspects of good teaching (advising, supervision of independent research and internships, etc.) would be facilitated by sufficient faculty and support staff.

Recommendation 2: Make almost all classrooms hi-tech or tech-ready at Storrs and the regional campuses. Faculty should not have to compete for classrooms or scale down their lesson plans due to a lack of technology. Provide support for the maintenance of these classrooms and for the training and assistance of faculty in using the technology for pedagogical excellence.

Recommendation 3: Provide resources in personnel, equipment, and time for helping faculty to develop their teaching, to try new methods, and to use various methods of gathering evidence of teaching excellence, such as an improved instrument for student ratings of instruction, teaching portfolios, and peer observations of teaching.

II. Gathering Evidence of Teaching Excellence

While most disciplines have arrived at some measure of agreement on what constitutes evidence of strong or superior research, we do not have similar consensus about criteria for demonstrating excellence in teaching. There is general agreement that student evaluations of teaching are one means of determining teaching excellence. However, there is also general agreement that the current instrument for student evaluations of teaching is flawed and out-dated and thus in need of serious revision. There is also agreement that relying totally on student evaluations, however valid the instrument, is inappropriate, since students are not qualified to make judgments about all aspects of teaching performance; thus, other measures, to be determined by individual departments, are needed for a nuanced picture of teaching.

Recommendation 1: Replace the current student ratings of instruction (SRI) instrument with a more appropriate, reliable, and valid instrument. An example of an SRI can be found in Appendix C. *It should be noted that this example is meant to demonstrate some possibilities, not prescribe a specific evaluation instrument.*

Changing the forms for student ratings of instruction (SRI) will require extensive work. Core questions should include student information (to assist in interpreting scores), overall instructor and course ratings, and diagnostic instructor and course questions. In addition, an SRI should incorporate:

- Multiple forms (for discussion, lab sections, studio classes, writing courses, graduate seminars, etc.) with additional diagnostic questions chosen by the instructor or department members.
- An option of a paper copy or a computerized version of the instrument.
- An improved procedure for reporting results and interpretations to the faculty member.
- A means for faculty to understand the relationship between student ratings and classroom learning objectives.
- Means of reducing the possibility of, and means of dealing with, potential bias toward women faculty, international faculty, and faculty of color in these evaluations, particularly for courses whose content includes sensitive or controversial materials and discussions.

Recommendation 2: While a revised and nuanced instrument for student ratings of instruction will be used throughout the university, each academic department should establish its own criteria and procedure for gathering evidence of excellence in teaching that does not rely exclusively on the student evaluations as evidence of good and effective teaching.

These additional methods of evaluation could include formative (for the benefit of the instructor alone) as well as summative (for PTR, merit, etc) evaluations, and could include the evaluation of all faculty on schedules considered appropriate by that department: teaching assistants, part-time instructors, assistant professors, associate professors, full professors. We recommend what is often called the 360-degree approach that includes the use of a (new and improved) student evaluation of teaching, peer (faculty in the department or program) and professional (Institute for Teaching and Learning) observations, the use of a teaching portfolio, and a summary evaluation using all evidence by the department head, designated mentor, PTR committee, or whomever the department decides is appropriate in that instance.

We include information about teaching portfolios in Appendix D, and peer and professional observation in appendices F and G, but these are intended as suggestions that would assist a department in setting its own standards for gathering evidence of teaching excellence. Obviously, the content of a portfolio or what is considered important in a teaching observation will vary by discipline and according to the values of the individual department.

Any method of gathering evidence about teaching that is used for promotion, tenure, and reappointment must be clearly understood by the candidate and explained in writing in that department's promotion, tenure, and reappointment procedures and recommendations.

Recommendation 3: That every department and program recognize and celebrate good teaching in their ranks, from teaching assistants and adjuncts through full professors, in the ways that they see fit. Many already do, and we hope that departments can learn from each other's methods of recognition and celebration.

III. **Opportunities for Supporting and Enhancing Teaching.**

Even the best—or especially the best—teachers constantly seek ways to enhance their teaching, whether as a result of formal evaluations or as part of their own individual quests for innovation and excellence. We encourage faculty to participate in professional development activities aimed at enhancing teaching practice, and ask that administrators recognize and reward them for doing so, both at Storrs and the regional campuses. These recommendations all include specific attention to part-time instructors (often called “adjuncts”) and teaching assistants, in addition to the tenured and tenure-track faculty. Specific recommendations are:

- A) Workshops and seminars dealing with issues of pedagogy and best practice (e.g. case method, group discussion, active learning strategies, teaching in laboratories, team teaching, the teaching of graduate students since we usually refer to the teaching of undergraduates, etc.) to promote excellence in teaching.
- B) Workshops on the appropriate use of technology (e.g., PowerPoint, Podcasts, Classroom Performance Systems, Tablet PC (i.e., Digital Ink), etc.,) as tools to deliver high-quality instruction.
- C) Faculty course development grants for new courses and for significant revisions of existing courses.
- D) Faculty attendance at discipline-specific, as well as general, teaching conferences through university-level travel grants. Further, encourage faculty and administrators to host existing discipline-specific, national and/or regional teaching conferences.
- E) Faculty handbook and/or website on teaching resources, policies, and practices to be made available to all faculty and administrators through the Institute for Teaching and Learning website.
- F) Faculty newsletter and/or website on teaching-related matters, teaching tips, syllabus construction, instructor-student interaction, etc., distributed monthly through the Institute for Teaching and Learning.
- G) Training in how to perform peer evaluation of teaching and the evaluation of teaching portfolios to be offered by the Institute for Teaching and Learning
- H) Provide faculty professional development on teaching growth and improvement plans for faculty whose teaching needs to improve, based on both summative and formative assessment.
- I) Teaching-related podcasts, weekly or bi-weekly, hosted by the Institute for Teaching and Learning to discuss teaching issues with invited faculty guests.
- J) Additional resources for large courses in order to promote small group and individual activities.

Appendix A

Teaching, Learning, and Assessment Task Force Members

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Veronica Makowsky * | Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education and Regional Campus Administration |
| Thomas DeFranco * | Associate Dean and Professor, Neag School of Education and Department of Mathematics |
| Lawrence Armstrong | Professor, Department of Kinesiology, Neag School of Education |
| John Bennett, Jr. | Department Head and Associate Professor, Department of Mechanical Engineering, School of Engineering |
| Lynn Bloom | Board of Trustees Distinguished Professor, AETNA Chair of Writing, Professor, Department of English, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences |
| Pamela Bramble | Associate Dean and Associate Professor, School of Fine Arts |
| Sarah Glaz | Professor and Associate Graduate Director for Instruction, Department of Mathematics, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences |
| Sean Jeffery | Associate Clinical Professor of Pharmacy, School of Pharmacy |
| Diane Lillo-Martin | Professor, Department of Linguistics, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences |
| Daniel Mercier | Director, Instructional Design and Development, Institute for Teaching and Learning |
| David Miller | Professor, and Associate Department Head and Coordinator of Undergraduate Studies, Department of Psychology, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences |
| Jeffrey Ogbar | Associate Professor, Department of History, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, and Director: Institute for African American Studies |
| David Ouimette | Executive Program Director, First Year Programs, Institute for Student Success |
| Sally Reis | Board of Trustees Distinguished Professor, University Teaching Fellow, Department of Educational Psychology, Neag School of Education |
| Andrew Rosman | Associate Professor, School of Business |
| Catherine Ross | Director, TA Programs & Associate Director, Institute for Teaching and Learning |
| Eric Soulsby | Assistant Vice Provost, Assessment |
| Hariharan Swaminathan | Department Head and Professor, Department of Educational Psychology, Neag School of Education |

* Co-chairs

Appendix B

Teaching, Learning, and Assessment Oversight Committee Members

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| Veronica Makowsky | Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education and Regional Campus Administration |
| Thomas DeFranco | Associate Dean and Professor, Neag School of Education and Department of Mathematics |
| Debra Kendall | Associate Dean and Professor, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences |
| Diane Lillo-Martin | Professor, Department of Linguistics, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences |
| Jeffrey Ogbar | Associate Professor, Department of History, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, and Director: Institute for African American Studies |
| Sally Reis | Board of Trustees Distinguished Professor, University Teaching Fellow, Department of Educational Psychology, Neag School of Education |
| Eric Soulsby | Assistant Vice Provost, Assessment |

Appendix C

Student Ratings of Instruction *“Sample Items”*

The following sample items were selected from the SRI's used by other universities which have undergone examination and revision of their forms. *They are provided as a starting point for our own new SRI forms. It is not anticipated that all of these questions will be included in our forms; additional ones may be added; some of the ones we use may need different wording.*

In addition to a core set of questions to be used for all courses, it is recommended that additional questions be used as selected by instructors and departments, with different additional questions for different types of courses (e.g., labs, discussion sections, studios, etc.).

The questions here are designed for face-to-face courses; on-line courses will need a modification specifically for them.

Note that an improved SRI form is only one component of the recommended new practices in evaluation of teaching. SRI's should not be the only source of information about teaching. In addition, improvements are recommended in the reporting of results, taking into account more detailed information about the students and course.

Student information

1. Which best describes this course for you?
 - A. Requirement for your major/minor
 - B. General Education requirement
 - C. Other requirement
 - D. Elective

2. What grade do you expect to receive in this class?
 - A A-
 - B+ B B-
 - C+ C C-
 - D+ D D-
 - F
 - Other (e.g. taking the course Pass/Fail, auditing course)

3. What is your class level? [OR: How many units have you completed?]
 - A. Freshman
 - B. Sophomore
 - C. Junior
 - D. Senior
 - E. Graduate
 - F. Other

4. On average, how many hours per week have you spent on this course, including attending classes, doing readings, reviewing notes, writing papers, and any other related course work?
 - A. Under 2
 - B. 2-3
 - C. 4-5
 - D. 6-7
 - E. 8-9
 - F. 10-11
 - G. 12-13
 - H. 14-15

- I. 16-17
- J. 18-19
- K. 20-21
- L. 22 or more

5. On average, how often did you attend class?

- A. Never
- B. Rarely
- C. Sometimes
- D. Often
- E. Always

6. In my opinion, the workload in this course was

- A. Excessive
- B. High
- C. Average
- D. Light
- E. Insufficient

7. My overall G.P.A. to date at UConn is

- A. Less than 2.00
- B. 2.00-2.49
- C. 2.50-2.99
- D. 3.00-3.49
- E. 3.50-4.00

Summative/Overall

| | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|--|-------------------|----------|---------|-------|----------------|
| Overall, this instructor's teaching was helpful to my learning the material in the course. | | | | | |

| | Very Poor | Unsatisfactory | Satisfactory | Very Good | Excellent |
|------------------------------|-----------|----------------|--------------|-----------|-----------|
| Overall, this instructor was | | | | | |

| | Definitely Not | No | Maybe | Yes | Definitely |
|----------------------------------|----------------|----|-------|-----|------------|
| Would you recommend this course? | | | | | |

Diagnostic

Course

| | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|--|-------------------|----------|---------|-------|----------------|
| 1. The course was well organized with serious attention to the learning objectives | | | | | |
| 2. The course learning objectives and assignments were clearly stated | | | | | |

| | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|-------------------|----------|---------|-------|----------------|
| 3. The assignments, presentations, projects or papers required in the course were well-aligned with the course learning objectives. | | | | | |
| 4. The course crucially relied on information/skills from its prerequisites | | | | | |
| 5. At this point in time, I feel that this course will be (or already has been) of value to me | | | | | |

| | Very Poor | Unsatisfactory | Satisfactory | Very Good | Excellent |
|---|-----------|----------------|--------------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. The course content was | | | | | |
| The ability of the course to develop my intellectual skills (critical analysis, written/oral communication, research methods, etc...) | | | | | |

| | Very Low | Low | Average | High | Very High |
|--|----------|-----|---------|------|-----------|
| 1. The intellectual challenge presented in this course was | | | | | |

Instructor

| | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|-------------------|----------|---------|-------|----------------|
| 1. The instructor communicated information effectively | | | | | |
| 2. The instructor showed interest in the progress of students | | | | | |
| 3. The tests/assignments were usually graded and returned promptly | | | | | |
| 4. The instructor made me feel free to ask questions, disagree, and express my ideas in class | | | | | |
| 5. The instructor seemed well-prepared for class | | | | | |
| 6. The instructor seemed genuinely interested in teaching the course | | | | | |
| 7. The instructor provided opportunities to meet with students outside of class | | | | | |

| | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|-------------------|----------|---------|-------|----------------|
| 8. My performance in this course has been evaluated fairly | | | | | |
| 9. The instructor gave adequate instructions concerning assignments | | | | | |
| 10. The instructor inspired me to think more about the content of the course than what was required | | | | | |
| 11. The instructor treated students respectfully | | | | | |
| 12. The instructor posed excellent questions or problems | | | | | |

| | Almost Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Frequently | Almost Always |
|---|--------------|--------|-----------|------------|---------------|
| 1. The instructor cleared up points of confusion | | | | | |
| 2. The instructor used class time well | | | | | |
| 3. The instructor stimulated student participation in the class | | | | | |

Appendix D

Teaching Portfolio

Some examples of artifacts that may be included in a teaching portfolio are:

(a) the candidate's personal statement on teaching, including a summary and explanation—not to exceed three pages—of the candidate's accomplishments and future plans to enhance teaching and learning, with an additional section summarizing these accomplishments and plans;

(b) a list of the candidate's *teaching assignments* on a semester-by-semester basis, from most to least recent, with a summary of the number of students in each class, as well as a summary of student evaluations for each course. (All teaching evaluations must be attached as an appendix to the Teaching Portfolio);

(c) copies of *course materials*, including syllabi, instructional Web pages, computer laboratory materials, and other examples of teaching and assessment materials, such as PowerPoint presentations; student papers and portfolios; examinations; exemplary student products; and creative student work;

(d) when applicable, a list of *graduate students, doctoral students, or other postdoctoral students supervised*, including each student's name, degree objective, and first post-graduate position;

(e) textbooks authored for courses; articles written about teaching pedagogy within various domains; conference papers and conferences organized on pedagogy;

(f) joint authorship with students of articles published; joint presentations at state or national conferences with students or other indications of faculty mentorship of students;

(g) and, as an appendix to the portfolio, copies of student ratings of instruction (SRI's) by students for each course taught (the candidate will include all student ratings of instructions).

Appendix E

Best Practice in Summative Peer Review and Observation

1. Peer review is best for the following areas of focus. (Seldin, 1984, pp. 139-140)

- selection and mastery of course content
- appropriateness of course objectives and instructional materials
- appropriateness of methodology for teaching specified section of courses
- appropriateness of techniques for fostering and measuring student learning
- course organization
- student achievement based on exams, projects, presentations, etc.
- concern for and interest in teaching
- homework assignments, textbooks, course websites and handouts

2. Peer reviewers understand their task and are well-prepared to accomplish it. (Chism, 1999, pp. 26-35)

- initial training provided by ITL on various ways to evaluate teaching artifacts and how to do observations
- reviewers should go through the process of being reviewed
- agreement on standards for effective teaching in the department, college or institution
- opportunities to engage in meaningful dialogue with other peers while process takes place for help in illuminating issues
- reviewers themselves learn through the process

3. Trust and confidence in the process are exhibited by all parties. (Chism, 1999, pp. 26-35).

- use of explicit standards and protocols
- procedures for handling conflicts of interest, personality conflicts, etc.
- conclusions always tied to evidence: teaching portfolio materials, observations, etc.
- written summaries provide opportunities for rebuttal

4. Teaching evaluation for summative purposes should always be holistic, carried out over an extended period of time and range of conditions, and should look at general patterns, not isolated incidences. (Chism, 1999, p 34)

- use of multiple observers and multiple observations

5. Ongoing departmental support of peer evaluation and oversight of the process and procedures, investment in improving the peer review process. (Chism, 1999, pp. 26-35)

Bibliography:

- Chism, N. (1999). *Peer Review of Teaching*. Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing.
- Seldin, P. (1984). *Changing Practices in Faculty Evaluation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Appendix F

Examples of Peer Evaluation of Teaching of On-line Courses

Department of Librarianship, Educational Technology, & Distance Instruction
East Carolina University
Peer Review Instrument
<http://LSIT.COE.ECU.EDU/peerReview/instrument.pdf>

Maryland Online (MOL), a statewide consortium of 19 Maryland community colleges and senior institutions
PEER COURSE REVIEW -- RUBRIC
<http://www.esac.org/fdi/rubric/finalsurvey/demorubic.asp>

Sloan-C Group:
http://www.sloan-c.org/publications/jaln/v7n1/v7n1_achtemeier.asp

Appendix G

Methods of Receiving Responses to the Draft Report

The Teaching, Learning, and Assessment Task Force Report was made available to faculty and staff for review, discussion, comments, and suggestions through several venues. These comments were compiled and reviewed by the committee.

Four Faculty Forums were held in Konover Auditorium in which a PowerPoint presentation was given on the overview report and on each subcommittee report. The forums were simulcast (audio only) to regional campuses. A discussion period followed each presentation where audience members could voice their opinions and pose questions. Notes were compiled and reviewed from each forum.

The forums were held as follows:

- Monday, March 19 - Overview Meeting with Tom DeFranco
- Thursday, March 22 - Evaluation of Teaching with Diane Lillo-Martin
- Monday, March 26 - Opportunities for Improving Teaching with David Miller
- Thursday, March 29 - Culture Change to Value Teaching with Andy Rosman

Website

A website was created <http://www.tlataskforce.uconn.edu/> where the task force report and subcommittee reports including the Forum PowerPoint presentations were posted (also audio of the subcommittee report presentations). The website offered a convenient way for faculty and staff to anonymously send electronic feedback on each of the reports. The website also lists committee members and their email addresses.

Council of Deans

Veronica Makowsky gave an overview and directed discussion of the TLA report to the Council of Deans on April 3rd.

Senate Executive Committee Meeting

Provost Nicholls advised the members of the Senate Executive Committee of the TLA task force report and where it could be accessed for review.

Individual E-mails:

Some faculty and staff elected to send e-mail responses directly to the task force chairs and these comments were circulated to the oversight committee for review.