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University Council

October 11, 2019

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Dear Colleagues:

The attached draft proposal from a subcommittee of the President's Task Force on Student Learning and Success for Recommendations for Measuring Teaching Effectiveness will be a discussion item for the October 18, 2019, Full University Curriculum Committee meeting.

Sincerely,

John Maerz, Chair

University Curriculum Committee

cc: Provost S. Jack Hu
Dr. Rahul Shrivastav



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Office of
Instruction

October 9, 2019

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To: University Curriculum and Faculty Affairs Committee
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Subject: Proposal to Improve Measurement of Teaching Effectiveness

The 2017 President's Task Force on Student Learning and Success contained twelve recommendations to improve student learning and success at the University of Georgia. Recommendation #7 was a proposal to strengthen systems to document and promote effective teaching at the University of Georgia. Dr. Marisa Pagnattaro and I co-chaired a committee (Dr. Peggy Brickman, Dr. Gary Greene, Dr. Andrew Owsiak) that met several times over the past year to examine approaches to improve the measurement and documentation of teaching effectiveness on campus. This past summer, two faculty members, Dr. Erin Dolan and Paula Lemons, with expertise and interest in this topic offered their input on the report the committee had prepared.

Essentially, this proposal outlines an approach where an instructor's teaching effectiveness should be measured by more than end-of-course evaluations alone. The proposal states that teaching effectiveness should include a student voice (end-of-course evaluations), peer voice (a system of peer evaluation), and a self-reflective piece from the instructor. The committee examined end-of-course evaluations from our peer and aspirational institutions and the questions listed in the proposal are in alignment with our peer and aspirants. Units can add to this list of ten questions as they see fit. The peer evaluation section contain broad guidelines on how units should proceed to develop a peer evaluation system. There is no one size fits all for this type of procedure given the diversity of units across campus.

CHARGE: UGA Task Force on Student Learning and Success (Dec. 1, 2017)
Recommendation 7: Strengthen Systems to Document and Promote Effective Teaching
https://president.uga.edu/resources/documents/final_task_force_report.pdf

PREAMBLE

Research and best practices in teaching evaluation emphasize the importance of three sources of evidence in evaluating teaching effectiveness and improving teaching over time: students, trained peers, and self. Students, as the focus of instruction, evaluate teaching based on their experiences as learners. Trained peers evaluate teaching according to established and accepted standards. Instructors can reflect on their own teaching based on their experiences in classrooms, working with students, and systematically examining over time what works to promote student learning and development. When considered collectively, these sources of evidence can provide a balanced and fair assessment of the effectiveness of teaching for both formative purposes, meaning the continuous improvement of an instructor's teaching over time, and summative purposes, meaning the evaluative judgment about the quality of the instructor's teaching at key timepoints such as annual review, promotion, and tenure. This report makes recommendations for strengthening systems to document and promote effective teaching by ensuring all three sources of evidence are represented equitably and used fairly in documenting and promoting effective teaching.

I. RELEVANT POLICIES

A. Board of Regents policy (8.3.5.1): Students must be given the opportunity to evaluate their instructors: "Each institution, as part of its evaluative procedures, will utilize a written system of faculty evaluations by students, with the improvement of teaching effectiveness as the main focus of these student evaluations. The evaluation procedures may also utilize a written system of peer evaluations, with emphasis placed on the faculty member's professional development. In those cases in which a faculty member's primary responsibilities do not include teaching, the evaluation should focus on excellence in those areas (e.g., research, administration) where the individual's major responsibilities lie."

B. UGA Academic Affairs Policy 4.07-16: Requires a common set of four questions on a scale for student end-of-course evaluations.

II. ACTION ITEMS/RECOMMENDATIONS

For promotion: A meaningful evaluation of the candidate's teaching requires the availability of credible evidence obtained through student evaluations, trained peer evaluation, and self-evaluation. To document significant accomplishment or excellence in teaching, the department is required to collect three forms of evidence (student, trained peer, and self) to evaluate the candidate's teaching activities during the probationary period. The exact methods of collecting and evaluating evidence are at the discretion of the department, but should follow a general structure and processes that ensure all three voices are represented.

Timing: Tenure-track faculty should be reviewed at least twice during the probationary period (i.e.,

as assistant professor). Tenured faculty should be reviewed at least twice prior to promotion to full professor. Periodic reviews should continue for the duration of a faculty appointment, at least twice every review period (i.e., five years). Lecturers and other Non-tenure track faculty with instructional appointments should be reviewed annually in the first two years and biennially thereafter.

Summary

National efforts to improve the evaluation of teaching in higher education emphasize the use of three sources of evidence: students, trained peers, and self. By focusing on three sources of evidence, we can avoid prescribing a single, perfect or model program unlikely to suit anybody, and instead suggest a method by which departments could create their own approach following good principles and best practices. Internal development of teaching evaluation processes may be perceived as more work than adopting someone else's tried and tested model program, but ultimately it saves time and increases buy-in because the process is tailored to suit specific department's needs. Spending that time "up front" seems slow and inefficient; it is likely to pay huge dividends later when the group doesn't need to debate small issues that arise because they've already had extensive discussions about objectives and approaches and have come to consensus on them. There will still be disagreements and discussions, but they are likely to be about the substance of the issues – what matters in evaluating teaching effectiveness. In the current vernacular, faculty are likely to all be "on the same page" if they have had discussions of objectives and approaches at the beginning.

Our group also supports the idea that, to foster investment in change, people involved in the change need to be involved in the development of the process from the beginning and need to have a real voice in what will happen. "Change" in this case may be changing how some of the information regarding teaching and learning is gathered, or "change" may expand to changing how teachers and students perceive their roles in a learning environment.

Below we made specific recommendations regarding each of the three sources of evidence as well as how the evidence can be collected, analyzed, and used to document and promote effective teaching.

1. Student Voice

1.1 Common, campus-wide, Student End-of-course Evaluation, which is centralized, standardized, automated, and recorded. For all courses taught by a faculty member, including those taught by adjuncts and graduate assistants, a survey comprising ~10 items should be available to students online. The following courses may be excluded:

- Courses involving individual instruction, such as independent study, internships, and practicums, thesis and dissertation supervision; and
- Class sections for which the number of possible respondents to the instrument is so small as to make it possible to identify individual students, thus compromising their confidentiality and possibly biasing their responses, or render results of limited statistical usefulness, such as any course where the number enrolled is less than or equal to five.

For multiple instructor courses, a separate survey should be provided for each instructor. In courses with multiple instructors, a separate survey is not needed for instructors who are 10% or less instructor of record on the course.

Faculty, including graduate teaching assistants, will have access to student comments associated with their course after grades have been submitted and may download them for personal use. Access by others to the written comments contained within the UGA Course Survey System will be based on determinations made at the college level. In colleges where access is granted, it will be only to those having a supervisory relationship to the faculty member and their designees (e.g., Deans, Department Chairs, College and Department Evaluation Administrators). Colleges wishing to grant access must make a request to OVPI. The default is no access.

End-of-course survey summary scores are statistical data that are difficult to compare among different courses and instructors for several reasons (outlined below). Thus, guidelines for interpreting course survey data that will be used as part of the evaluation process should be developed by the departmental voting faculty a minimum of one year in advance of the faculty evaluation process for which they will be used. This will help to ensure (a) that the individual being evaluated and those conducting the evaluation have a mutual understanding regarding procedures, standards, and expectations, and (b) that the criteria for evaluation are consistently applied to all individuals being evaluated by a unit.

Several factors should be taken into account when developing guidelines for the interpretation of end-of-course surveys. Course level, requirements, content and difficulty, class size and composition, teaching style and response rate can all influence end-of-course survey responses and thus limit the usefulness and meaning of summary statistical data. Therefore, departmental voting faculty should evaluate a given instructor/course based on scores provided for that instructor/course combination from year to year to assess consistency and improvements made to ensure quality teaching. Furthermore, end-of-course surveys provide ordinal data that should be evaluated using distributions rather than averages. Results of the entire evaluation with a distribution of responses, number of students, course GPA (if possible), and response rate should be reported to the dean, the department chair, and the faculty member. Units will have discretion regarding further distribution and comparison within departments.

If an instructor provides class time for students to complete the survey, students should be given at least 15 minutes to complete the survey. The instructor should not be present while the survey is being completed.

Potential Standardized Required Preamble and Questions (IDEA Paper #50 Course eval should cover organization & planning, clarity & comm skills, teacher-student interaction, course difficulty, grading, student self-rated learning).

Student evaluations of teaching play an important role in the review of faculty. Your opinions influence the review of instructors that takes place every year. The University of Georgia recognizes that student evaluations of teaching are often influenced by students' **unconscious and unintentional** biases about the personal characteristics of the instructor.

As you fill out the course evaluation, please focus on the quality of the instruction and the content of the course (e.g., assignments, textbook, in-class material) and not unrelated matters (e.g., instructor's appearance).

1. The instructor clearly defined and explained the course objectives and expectations.
2. The instructor effectively engaged students in class.
3. I have a deeper understanding of the subject matter as a result of this course.
4. The instructor was responsive to student inquiries in a timely manner.

5. I would take another course with this instructor.

[Response options on a 5-point agreement scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree]

6. Overall, the instructor was

7. Overall, the course was

[Response options on 5-point quality scale of Excellent, Very Good, Good, Fair, Poor]

8. What grade do you expect that you will earn in this course?

[Response options: A B C D F]

Open ended items:

9. What were the main strengths of the course?

10. What suggestions do you have for improving the course?

11. Any additional comments?

Unit-Specific Questions

Units may add additional questions that may be discipline specific or needed for other purposes such as accreditation.

1.2. Student Mid-Course Evaluations. Midterm evaluations (surveys, moderated discussions) can provide instructors with feedback on how to improve their courses and allow students an opportunity to provide input before the academic period is complete. This process may have a positive effect on the end-of-course evaluations by giving students an opportunity to be voice any concerns and to make suggestions for improving teaching while the instructor still has the opportunity to take action.

Mid-term evaluations should be used to support instructors in making improvements (formative), rather than making evaluative judgments about effectiveness (summative). Thus, they should not be kept as a record and should not be used to evaluate the instructor during the promotion and tenure process or annual evaluations. Mid-course evaluations can be used by instructors at their discretion to craft reflective statements on their teaching.

The new campus-wide course evaluation tool (SurveyDig) could allow easier implementation of mid-course evaluation. Questions for a mid-course survey might include open-ended items such as:

- What is the instructor doing well that they should keep doing?
- What elements of the course are helping you learn?
- What specific things should the instructor do differently to help you learn?
- What specific suggestions do you have for improving the course so you are better able to learn?

The Center for Teaching and Learning holds workshops on effective use of mid-course evaluations and maintain information on its website regarding how to develop, implement, and make use of mid-course evaluations.

2. Trained Peer Voice

Trained peer evaluation processes should be developed at the unit level (i.e., department, school, college) in ways that follow the principles of effective peer evaluation for both formative and summative purposes while keeping workload reasonable. We recommend the following general structure:

- Individuals should be selected within the unit to serve as peer evaluators. These individuals can be drawn from other units as needed. These individuals should be charged not only with evaluating the teaching of their colleagues but also with serving as *learners* who will assist the unit in understanding the connections, opportunities, and challenges among various undergraduate courses (e.g., how courses relate to each other across the curriculum).
- Departments should consider including individuals from another department who will bring an outside perspective to the unit. Departments could work reciprocally so that all departments benefit and contribute.
- Selected individuals should complete training offered by the Center for Teaching and Learning on how to prepare for, conduct, and debrief a peer evaluation.
- Priority should be placed on completing peer evaluations of TT faculty during the probationary period and Lecturers annually/biennially, but should continue throughout a faculty member's teaching career. Peer evaluations should be conducted in a way that promotes continuous improvement. For example, peer evaluations could be conducted twice for the same course for a given faculty member, or twice for different types of courses. The aim is to allow the faculty member to take action on feedback between the two sets of evaluations.
- Peer evaluators should make use of multiple sources of evidence, including review of syllabi, instructional and assessment materials, and observations of instruction to maximize the trustworthiness of the evaluation and reduce potential for bias.
- At the completion of each peer evaluation, the evaluators should meet briefly with the faculty member to discuss findings, answer questions, and discuss possible approaches for teaching development. A brief summary of the findings and the discussion should be written by the peer evaluators and shared confidentially with the faculty member for formative purposes.
- For summative purposes, peer evaluators should work together at key evaluation timepoints (e.g., third-year review, promotion) to write a letter that synthesizes data from the peer evaluations. This letter should focus on describing and evaluating the trajectory of the candidate's teaching effectiveness and teaching improvement over time rather than teaching effectiveness at any single point in time.

To develop a peer evaluation process that fits this structure, units should use a collaborative process to develop criteria and instruments to assess teaching using peer evaluation. Units are encouraged to develop clear, well-articulated expectations for teaching effectiveness and sponsor a process to support teaching skill development. Units are also encouraged to pilot test new approaches to evaluating teaching effectiveness that follow this general structure. Any pilot programs should evaluate teaching in relatively low-stakes contexts, such as annual evaluations (as opposed to tenure and promotion), and be focused on professional development and growth of the instructor. Accordingly, such pilot programs might consist of a phase in of peer evaluation for new faculty early in their career (e.g., before third year review, before promotion, and for instructors before re-appointment), as well as for faculty who are interested in making substantive changes to their teaching or would benefit from feedback about their teaching. Departments who pilot programs can serve as exemplars to help other departments develop peer mentoring and teaching evaluation programs.

The Center for Teaching and Learning will play an important role in helping units design and implement their processes, including providing training, resources, and exemplars for the following:

- How to conduct effective peer evaluations, including selecting appropriate evaluators and evaluation tools, establishing common guidelines, and conducting course observations;
- How to provide formative feedback on teaching in writing and in person; and
- How to write summative evaluations of teaching effectiveness that accurately reflect the trajectory of an individual's teaching over time.

Mentoring of junior tenure-track and non-tenure track faculty is particularly encouraged to make sure they get a strong start in the classroom. For tenure-track faculty, mentoring should also include helping junior faculty balance effective teaching with the need to produce high-quality research and helping senior faculty continue to improve their teaching over time.

3. Instructor Voice: Self-evaluation

Over the past two decades, more and more higher education institutions have been considering faculty self-evaluations (sometimes also called self-assessments or reflections) as evidence of teaching effectiveness. These self-evaluations frequently take the form of statements included in annual progress reports or documentation of teaching accomplishments over the evaluation period. Instruments for self-evaluation may include structured forms that document the type of course taught, number of students, teaching objectives, activities, accomplishments, shortcomings, and plans for improvement. Checklists and writing prompts for reflection may also be used as a part of the process.

The literature generally agrees that self-evaluations should be utilized with other measures of teaching effectiveness, such as peer evaluations, to illustrate how the instructor is thinking about their teaching and taking steps to improve over time based on evidence gathered from student end-of-course evaluations and peer evaluations. The Center for Teaching and Learning will support faculty in learning how to reflect on their teaching and write self-reflections by offering professional development and providing advice and exemplars on its website.

In sum, the work of organizing materials for self-evaluation on an annual basis and critically reflecting upon teaching efforts can lead to overall increases in effectiveness and aid faculty in documenting their individual achievements in preparation for retention, tenure, and promotion review.

III. NEXT STEPS

Because the evaluation of teaching involves both instruction and the promotion process, a committee comprised of individuals from University Curriculum and Faculty Affairs should be involved to provide clear guidance for faculty (especially department heads) about the use of teaching evaluation data. The committee should make recommendations about good practices for using and presenting student end-of-course evaluations, peer evaluations, and self-evaluations in multiple contexts: merit review, promotion and tenure, reappointment/promotion for lecturers, post-tenure review, and annual evaluation materials.