Student Evaluation of Teaching Task Force Course Evaluation Subcommittee

Tuesday, February 14th, 2012 Preliminary Report

Committee Members:

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Goal of the Course Evaluation Subcommittee

The goal of the Course Evaluation Subcommittee is to take a broad and holistic look at the practice of teaching and to make recommendations to the SET Task Force with regard to the SET instrument being developed that will place it properly within a ***context*** of evaluation of teaching as a whole.   The Subcommittee will explore and examine a broad range of methods for evaluating teaching and provide guidance to departments in the development and/or evolution of their strategies for evaluating teaching. Specifically, the Subcommittee will address:

- What are the dimensions of high quality teaching?
- What types of data might be gathered by departments and professors to shed light on the quality of teaching being performed by professors?
- What role should the Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) instrument play in the context of a broader evaluation of teaching strategy?

To a lesser extent, the Subcommittee will also comment on how any collected data should be handled and interpreted for both summative and formative purposes.

Organization of this Preliminary Report

This report begins with a short "beliefs and values" statement followed by a statement of the Subcommittee's view of what constitutes high quality teaching. Following that, the report is broken up into two sub-sections concerning the dimensions of high quality teaching and the types of data that can be gathered to make an informed analysis of the quality of actual teaching. The report concludes with a table suggesting elements that together would comprise a teaching portfolio that instructors may use for both formative and summative evaluation of their own teaching.

Beliefs and Values of the Subcommittee

The Evaluation of Teaching Subcommittee believes:

- Teaching is a complex, multi-dimensional practice which cannot be evaluated effectively by any single instrument, whether that be student evaluation, peer observation, personal reflection or otherwise
- That being said, students are critical stakeholders in the process of teaching and learning and have valuable perspectives that can be used in the development of an instructor's teaching practice
- Increased student learning, another complex and difficult to assess phenomenon, is of the highest priority and the primary goal of efforts to evaluate teaching
- All instructors have room for improvement—as instructors, we are never "done" when it comes to developing our craft
- The overwhelming majority of instructors at JMU are committed and conscientious practitioners of their craft currently at different stages in their personal growth and development
- Consequently, the instances in which quality of teaching falls so low as to warrant removal/suspension of an instructor from teaching roles are ***extremely rare*** though not nonexistent
- The quality of student experience and of instructors' professional lives could be strengthened significantly by a thoughtful, holistic approach to the evaluation of teaching

What Constitutes High Quality Teaching?

Teaching is a complex, multi-dimensional, professional practice that defies simple, one-size-fits-all definitions. While a deep knowledge in one's chosen field is an important dimension of quality teaching, it is only one component—quality teaching also comprises understanding of how humans learn, diverse pedagogical strategies that can be used to engage students, an appropriate attitudinal disposition towards students and teaching, as well as professional habits and behaviors associated with rich learning environments. The knowledge and skills one needs to be a high quality instructor are not always a part of the deeper training that instructors receive in their fields (e.g. as a part of graduate school) and must be developed "on the job" during one's career.

Dimensions of High Quality Teaching

The following sub-section describes the dimensions of high quality teaching. The categories listed here are not necessarily comprehensive nor mutually exclusive, but represent the Subcommittee's first attempt at exploring this concept.

Knowledge of Content (KoC)

A high quality instructor should be an expert in the content being taught. The standards for what constitutes an "expert" will naturally vary across fields and disciplines. Content may include skills, objective knowledge, modes of inquiry or problem solving, and attitudes of practitioners in a given domain.

Knowledge of Pedagogy (KoP)

Content may be taught in a variety of ways. High quality instructors are aware of the various pedagogical tools and teaching practices that have and can be used to create a high quality learning experience for students. These practices will vary widely given the type of content, size of classes, type of students, and other factors related to the specific context of the teaching situation. Underlying many or most of these practices is an understanding about how humans learn in general, and more particularly how they best learn a particular body of content.

Knowledge of Assessment (Assessment)

An instructor's ability to provide high quality feedback to students on their learning processes is predicated upon their ability to gather high quality information about what students are learning as they engage with content. High quality instructors, therefore, will be aware of and employ a range of assessment tools that allow them to understand where students stand, and in turn convey that status to them.

Student Learning (Learning)

In the presence of high quality instructions, learning gains by students are higher. What students learn and how this is assessed are questions not dealt with by this particular dimension of teaching.

Course Preparation (Prep)

High quality instructors put significant energy into preparing for teaching.

Student Expectations (Expectations)

High quality instructors not only have high expectations of their students, but also make efforts to make course learning objectives relevant to students. This may involve changing the objectives, or it may involve changing the perspectives of students so that they come to see course learning objectives as relevant.

Respect for Students (Respect)

This category actually captures a collection of attitudes and behaviors that high quality instructors exhibit towards students including: trust, respect, decency, time commitment, consistency, flexibility, and not blaming students for having arrived in a class inadequately prepared by past experiences/coursework.

Post-class Achievements (Achievement)

As a result of high-quality instruction, students will go on to achieve notable things in the future. This is not assessable within the confines of the semester in which a course is taught but entails an effort to keep track of what students achieve once they have left the classroom and are asked to apply their knowledge and skills in their lives.

Self-Reflection (Reflection)

High quality instructors reflect on their own performance and are continually engaged in a process that will allow them to grow and adapt as instructors over the lifetime of their careers.

Modeling Life-long Learning (Modeling)

High quality instructors are models for students of what we mean by "life-long learning." They convey to students that the goal of learning is not solely for the purpose of receiving a passing grade or degree credentials, but that it is the path towards becoming an "enlightened citizen who leads a meaningful and productive life."

Commitment to Academic Community (Commitment)

High quality instructors exhibit a commitment to furthering the scholarship in their field.

Types of Data That Can Inform the Teaching Evaluation

Student perceptions of teaching can not and should not be expected to provide information about all of the aspects of high quality teaching described above. The Subcommittee rather envisions that instructors and departments will collect a range of data that collectively can inform the teaching evaluation. Again, this is not intended to be a comprehensive list, but rather a suggestion of some of the more obvious approaches to gathering data on teaching.

Student Perceptions of Teaching (Students)

These are instruments delivered either during or at the end of teaching which gather students' perceptions of the teaching and learning process. The SET instrument that this Task Force is working to create would fall into this category.

Peer Observation and/or Peer-Facilitated Reflection (Peer)

This category comprises situations in which one or more peers actually sit in and observe an instructor/colleague at work, or methods such as the Teaching Analysis Poll (TAP) in which a colleague will facilitate a discussion with students designed to gather feedback about the teaching and learning process.

Instructor Narrative/Self-Reflection (Self)

Instructors can and should reflect upon their practice as teachers. This reflection can be more or less formal, and may manifest itself in more or less concrete goals for intentional self-development. These goals will change over time as the instructor matures as a teacher.

Objective Measures of Learning (Objective)

Many fields have standardized tests, concept inventories, or other assessments which can provide an externally validated indication of the levels of student learning in a particular subject area.

Scholarly Work (Scholarship)

Instructors can demonstrate knowledge of subject matter through their publications, creations, consulting or outreach work, or in other ways that would typically be classified as "scholarly work" for the purposes of promotion and tenure.

Measures of Students' Metacognitive Growth (Metacognition)

Metacognition refers to all of the ways that students may grow in a course other than with respect to the core content covered in the course. This could be changes in attitudes,

beliefs, behaviors, and motivation. It could also comprise measures of the "21st Century Skills": creativity, collaboration, communication, critical thinking.

Portfolios of Student Work (Portfolios)

Another way to demonstrate level and quality of student work over time is to collect representative samples of student work that can be assembled into portfolios that highlight the level of quality students are capable of after having studied under an instructor.

Syllabi and Other Course Materials (Syllabi)

Instructors work hard to produce high quality syllabi and other supporting documents for a course such as engaging assignments, tutorials, course readers, and labs. These materials can provide evidence of meticulous course preparation.

Summary

The table on the following page shows the relationship between the dimensions of high quality teaching and the sources of data that would inform the evaluation of teaching. It is intended to put the SET instrument in context and also to provide guidance to instructors and departments engaged in the process of developing an evaluation strategy for teaching. Comments, criticism, additions, and other feedback are not only welcome, but strongly encouraged.

Table 1: Ways that various types of data can be used to evaluate the quality of teaching

Type of Data	Dimensions of High Quality Teaching										
	KoC	KoP	Assessment	Learning	Prep	Expectations	Respect	Achievement	Reflection	Modeling	Commitment
Students					✔	✔	✔			✔	
Peer	✔	✔					✔				
Self	✔	✔	✔		✔	✔	✔		✔	✔	✔
Objective				✔				✔			
Scholarship	✔									✔	✔
Metacognition				✔							
Portfolios		✔	✔	✔		✔		✔			✔
Syllabi	✔	✔	✔		✔	✔	✔		✔		