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

Overview

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 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 them in Fall 2013.

Guidelines for Student Evaluations of Faculty

Task Force Background

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 are defined as the courses’ instructors of record. Faculty 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. Breaches of confidentiality will only occur in
instances of immediate personal threat.

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 period.
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:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 longer surveys typically
lead to lower response rates and less accurate responses.

Encouraging Student Participation
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 student 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 completion of course evaluation is
  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 a peer pressure incentive at the course level. One instructor currently offers
  students extra credit if there is 100% class participation in course evaluations.
• 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.

Electronic Course Evaluations
Institutions are encouraged 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. 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 Use of Evaluation Results
While campuses will likely report the responses to their own questions relevant to a particular program or college, the responses to the five required survey questions will be reported to UT System.

Online Student Comments
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 will develop the policies and procedures to oversee this communication.

Continuous Feedback
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

Task Force Background
In spring 2012, a task force was created to identify effective ways to conduct faculty peer reviews. Graduate deans 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 their report that a number of UT System institutions already have peer observation policies in place, but there is substantial variation across and within institutions. Emphasizing the importance of peer observations 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 encouraged to implement a peer review system as part of a comprehensive effort for evaluation of faculty teaching. Based on the principles and recommendations presented in the task force report, the following guidelines are provided to assist institutions that choose to conduct peer evaluations of faculty teaching.

Conducting Peer Reviews
An evaluation committee should oversee the evaluation process, taking into account a series of observations of teaching along with other indicators – including student evaluations, longitudinal surveys, and measures of grade inflation, as appropriate. Observations should be focused on professional coaching that is helpful even to the most experienced teachers.

Though peer reviews may be used in a formative manner, they are more useful when used to improve faculty teaching – particularly when peer observations are conducted. Evaluation 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 should be asked to supply for their records a narrative covering what they have learned from the observation process.

Each unit (college, school, or department) should develop its own system for peer observation appropriate to the subject being taught and the course format. To be beneficial to students, helpful to faculty, and credible to all concerned, each evaluation report should include suggestions for improvement. No one should be penalized for an item marked “needs improvement,” unless a series of observations shows no effort on the instructor’s part to improve.

Institutions and their units should define “peer” for their purposes. Consider whether a peer can be of 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.

**Minimum Requirements for Peer Review Reports**

Evaluations should include the use of short forms that merit careful attention by the reviewer. Questions on the forms should call for either a discursive answer 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**

Peer evaluators should be given detailed guidance and an opportunity for training. Evaluation templates can be provided to guide the evaluator’s observations of teaching.

**Recommended Frequency of Peer Observations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty Level</th>
<th>Frequency of Observations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Junior faculty</td>
<td>At least once per year</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tenured faculty</td>
<td>Once every three years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entry level, non-tenure track faculty</td>
<td>Once a year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior non-tenure track faculty</td>
<td>Once every three years</td>
</tr>
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</table>
The Use of Evaluation Results
Institutions must determine whether peer evaluations should be included in annual reviews, but it should be left to the faculty member to determine whether their peer evaluations should be included in their promotion and tenure reviews. Institutions must ensure that faculty members are made aware of the consequences of not including peer evaluations in their reviews. Faculty members should be encouraged to have a mentor from outside the department that will conduct the peer evaluations. Though the results of such reviews can help a faculty member improve his or her teaching, the results are less likely to be useful in the tenure review process.

UT System will not be collecting the results of peer evaluations at this time.

Implementation
The UT System encourages campuses to adopt a process for peer evaluation of faculty, including the format and guidelines contained herein.

Sample Template
Included with these recommendations is a template for peer evaluations, developed by UTS faculty members.