

DRAFT

A Proposal to Improve the Evaluation of Teaching at Rutgers University

Introduction

Teaching is a core responsibility of faculty at Rutgers University, whether it involves the classroom, the laboratory, the studio, the clinic, or the dissertation committee. It is not surprising that a large, decentralized university such as Rutgers uses a wide range of approaches to evaluating teaching—from robust programs that include peer observation of teaching, student opinions on course and instructor quality, and the creation of a teaching portfolio, to other approaches that rely solely on student course evaluation scores. Ensuring that our students receive high quality teaching is essential, and creating systems of evaluation that are reliable and useful is critical to attaining the goals of Rutgers' Strategic Plan: creating a culture that rewards faculty quality and improving our students' educational experience.

In the spring of 2017, the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs convened a group of faculty from Rutgers-Newark, Rutgers-Camden, Rutgers-New Brunswick, and Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences (RBHS). Task Force members were recommended by their respective provosts. A list of Task Force members is appended to this proposal.

The Task Force met through the spring and summer, and developed this proposal, having reviewed a variety of reports produced over several decades on the improvement of the evaluation of teaching. In parallel, the New Brunswick Faculty Council and the New Brunswick Chancellor convened a faculty and staff committee to address the improvement of teaching evaluation. The Task Force reviewed that draft report, as well as those mentioned below.

Background: A Brief History of the Current System of Evaluation

Prior to 1991, there was no requirement at Rutgers University that teaching be evaluated in any formal way. In 1991, the Academic Forum Committee on Teaching recommended the creation of three Teaching Excellence Centers (TECs), one in Newark, one in New Brunswick, and one in Camden. As part of its duties, the TEC in New Brunswick was given the responsibility to develop and implement a mechanism for student evaluation of instruction, which had been outlined, with a template for the survey form, by the Academic Forum Committee. This task began in 1992, and quickly, a new survey form was created by the diligence and effort of former Vice President for Undergraduate Education Susan Forman, which is still the basic student ratings form used to this day.

Use of the SIRS has grown dramatically over the past 25 years, and it has moved online. As of spring 2017, all schools in legacy Rutgers except the Rutgers Law School, and two schools in RBHS, Pharmacy and Nursing, use the SIRS. Over 9,000 courses have been evaluated since inception of the SIRS.

Although surveys of student opinion on course and instructor quality are common in U.S. higher education, they are not without criticism. Some studies have indicated that bias—either conscious or unconscious—may affect the ratings of women and minority faculty. Low response rates make the validity of the data less reliable, and some students’ dislike for quantitative courses may depress instructor ratings. Other critics believe that faculty who are “easy graders” fare better than those who are not. All of these concerns support the use of multiple measures of teaching quality.

SIRS was never intended as a ‘one size fits all’ tool for the evaluation of teaching, nor as the sole method of evaluating teaching. Its purpose was to provide some baseline information for departments and deans, and eventually the Promotion Review Committee, in the evaluation of teaching for promotion and tenure reviews. What was expected, and attempted on a number of occasions, was that departments and schools would use more robust methods of evaluating teaching, from peer review of teaching materials, classroom observation, department discussion, and so forth. The University Senate made a considerable effort to develop a more robust evaluation system with the [2002 Senate Resolution on Charge S-0109 Best Practice in Assessment of Teaching](#), and the Faculty Council in New Brunswick followed up. ([New Brunswick Faculty Council Resolution on Evaluation of Teaching](#) of 2007).

None of the changes recommended by these groups were widely implemented. Departments across the University vary in teaching evaluation and assessment practices. As the Promotion Review Committee reviews the quality of candidates’ teaching across the university, it has become apparent that the methods used to evaluate teachers are highly variable across departments. What has also been made very clear is that some departments have decided to rely virtually solely on the SIRS itself, and do little else to assess instructors or teaching. Other departments have a rich history of serious and comprehensive evaluation of teaching.

In those departments where evaluation is comprehensive, the goals of evaluation extend beyond providing evidence to the PRC. These evaluations are also used to inform instructional improvement for individual faculty and for programs within the department. Simple reliance on the quantitative metrics of SIRS is not sufficient to support such guidance, although we believe that student course evaluations should continue to be used, and have a recommendation below addressing that issue.

In 2017, we face a very different university than in 1992, and we live in a very different technological environment. The University has become much larger and much more diverse through the merger with UMDNJ and the creation of RBHS. The very structure of the University has changed, with new Chancellor positions responsible for academic affairs in their areas.

We believe that the current methods for evaluating teaching, for many schools and departments, rely too heavily on the Student Instructional Ratings Survey (SIRS) to the exclusion of peer evaluation of course materials, classroom observation, or other methods

of assessing teaching. The considerable technological advances we have experienced since 1992 have changed the world, and in particular, have brought powerful methods of assessment and communications to every instructor's and student's computer or cellphone. Modern course management systems permit polling of students with ease. We have excellent survey tools available through a number of sources, including Qualtrics and tools 'built into' course management systems.

The model developed in 1992 is not adequate for a robust evaluation of teaching, and is not respectful of the new structure of the institution, and of the diversity of teaching and learning that occurs within RU. A more robust system, empowering the Chancellors and deans to create and implement procedures for the evaluation of teaching in their units, is in order.

I. New System for Evaluating Teaching

Our proposal combines concern for a University-wide focus on multiple measures of teaching quality with respect for local campus and school priorities. We are proposing a framework for evaluating teaching that will provide for a basic uniform approach to evaluating teaching, but which can be tailored to the particular characteristics of a discipline or method of teaching (for example, evaluating clinical instruction in the medical schools may be handled differently than evaluating teaching a large lecture class or a studio class in a conservatory).

Our proposal is intended to apply to *all* individuals who teach Rutgers students: tenured and tenure track faculty, non-tenure track faculty, part-time lecturers, and teaching assistants. It is expected that all faculty who teach will be evaluated on a regular basis.

We distinguish between two forms of evaluation of teaching: summative and formative. *Summative* evaluation is retrospective and is reviewed as part of a personnel decision (reappointment, promotion, or tenure). *Formative* evaluation is prospective and is designed to help faculty improve teaching.

- A. Each Chancellor will establish a Teaching Evaluation Council (TEC) chaired by the Provost or a Vice Chancellor. The TEC will serve as a clearinghouse for ideas and suggestions on the improvement of the evaluation of teaching, and will act as an advocate, through the Provost or Vice Chancellor, for resources for improving teaching, its assessment, and the evaluation of teaching for all instructors-- full time and part time, tenure-track and non-tenure track. In addition, it will assist departments as they prepare or revise their individual plans and procedures for evaluating teaching.
- B. Each school will develop a *plan for the evaluation of teaching*. The dean's office will then prepare a regular report on the evaluation of teaching in all its departments, to be reviewed by the Chancellor's TEC, on a regular basis.

- C. Each department within a school will be required to prepare a systematic plan for teaching evaluation, drawing on the assistance of their dean's office, their Chancellor's TEC and the Center for Teaching Advancement and Assessment Research (CTAAR). The dean is responsible for ensuring that each department has developed such a plan. Each department must have a thorough and comprehensive plan, covering the variety of courses offered by the department, and supporting each category of faculty--tenured and tenure-track, full time non-tenure track, part-time lecturers, and teaching assistants.
1. Departments and schools will include summative assessments in their evaluation model, and formative evaluations should also be done. Chancellors and/or deans will develop a policy on the nature and frequency of formative evaluations.
 2. Formative evaluations, designed to improve the quality of teaching, can include a focus on a current course or on subsequent teaching. Formative assessments within courses can include mid-course surveys, solicited feedback from students or collegial observations. Formative assessments for future use can include the above as well as curricular reviews by colleagues, comments from students, etc. Summative evaluations, designed to provide evaluative judgments, are typically used to make retention, tenure, promotion and other employment-related decisions. Upon request, the Center for Teaching Advancement and Assessment will confer with and assist faculty to develop instruments to gather data for formative evaluations. The results of formative assessments may not be used in the reappointment/promotion/tenure process without the faculty member's consent.
 3. Schools and departments will build systems of assessment of teaching that correspond to the different ranks of instructors. For example, promotions for tenure track faculty are subject to review by the Promotion Review Committee, so evaluations will need to take into consideration that individuals unfamiliar with the discipline will need to understand how the department has evaluated the candidate for promotion, and why it has reached a particular conclusion. Non-tenure track faculty are subject to review by the relevant department and Dean, and the assessment of their teaching will meet the standards approved by the Chancellor, Dean, and department. Part time lecturers are subject to review by the department.
 4. Every course taught by nontenured faculty, including teaching assistants and part-time lecturers, will be evaluated every semester. Departments will propose an evaluation timetable for tenured faculty, which must be approved by the Dean and Chancellor.

II. Overview of Assessment Practices in the New System

Each departmental system of evaluation of teaching should draw from the following practices. At a minimum, departments must include solicitation of student opinions, peer observation of teaching, and review of course materials in their assessment efforts.

- A. Surveys. Formative surveys are the responsibility of the department and Dean, in consultation with CTAAR. A summative survey (SIRS or some alteration of SIRS), will be made available through CTAAR or an equivalent office. We recommend that SIRS be revised to include two standard questions to be used University wide (please see below). Departments and schools may choose additional questions. For each department or program, a department set of responses will be reported for comparison to the results for individual courses. The departmental report will include the number of Yes and No results per course section for instructor, and the average number for the department, as well as the proportion of students who responded. In cases where non-respondents far exceed departmental averages, that should be noted as well. SIRS scores with low response rates should indicate that the department should work with the faculty member to improve the student response rate in the future.
- B. Teaching Portfolio. Each instructor will make a teaching portfolio and in each teaching evaluation report to the Chancellor, departments and deans must explain how these will be used to evaluate teaching, updating as necessary.
- C. Peer Review. Each department and program is expected to create a process of peer review, including a review of teaching materials, and an in-class observation by a peer. In the reports prepared by the schools for the TEC, each school will describe how peer review is conducted, and how its results are used to evaluate teaching.
- D. Frequency. As part of the department's teaching evaluation plan, the frequency of various forms of evaluation must be specified. At a minimum, tenure track faculty must receive a comprehensive evaluation each time a candidate is considered for reappointment, tenure, promotion, or post-tenure review. Tenured faculty should receive a full teaching evaluation at least every three years. Full-time NTT faculty should receive a full teaching evaluation at least every three years. Departments should specify the frequency of PTL and teaching assistant evaluation, but at a minimum, SIRS results should be reviewed for every course or section taught by a PTL or teaching assistant.
- E. Each department should have a method of reviewing innovative teaching tools and techniques.
- F. We recommend that the SIRS be revised to be comprised of at least two questions; departments may add other questions to the SIRS. The two standard questions on the University-wide SIRS will be:

Q1: Did the instructor contribute to your learning? Yes, No
Q2: Did the course content contribute to your learning? Yes, No.

- G. Departments will be expected to take into account the multiple methods for evaluating teaching when developing the departmental narrative for faculty being evaluated for reappointment, promotion, and/or tenure. The department's conclusion that the faculty member's teaching exceeds, meets, or does not meet standards, must be supported with evidence from the department's evaluation process.
- H. CTAAR will provide assistance to the TECs with respect to interpreting and accounting for potential bias issues in SIRS responses as noted above. Information about these limitations will also be provided to the Promotion Review Committee.

III. Suggested Timeline for Implementation

- A. This plan prepared by the Task Force will be sent to the chancellors and provosts for discussion by July 1, 2017. After general consensus has been reached, the plan, including any revisions resulting from the chancellor and provost review, will be sent to the University Senate and campus Faculty Councils by September 1, 2017. A response from those bodies will be requested by December 1, 2017. The responses will be sent to the chancellors by the first week of the Spring 2018 semester.
- B. Chancellors will create Teaching Excellence Councils by October 15, 2017. A pre-existing office that supports teaching and assessment can be used as the TEC. The TECs and CTAAR will assist the deans and departments as needed in preparing teaching evaluation plans. The membership of each TEC should broadly represent a range of disciplines and perspectives on effective teaching.
- C. Deans will solicit teaching evaluation plans from each department, which will be due on or before March 1, 2018, and will approve or request modifications of those plans by April 1, 2018. The University Senate and Campus Faculty Council advice will inform the development of these plans in the schools and departments. These plans will then be submitted to each Chancellor's Teaching Excellence Council by May 15, 2018.
- D. The TECs will review the plans presented by the deans, and make suggestions for change if any. The TECs will send a written report to the deans based on their review of the initial teaching evaluation plans by September 1, 2018.
- E. The new teaching evaluation plans will be used for the promotion process for AY2018-2019 beginning September 1, 2018.

- F. The current SIRS will remain in place through Fall 2018 and will be distributed and processed by CTAAR. Departments and deans will handle formative assessment for their units with the assistance of CTAAR. Departments and deans may add questions to the SIRS and use them as part of their formative assessment process if they like, or they can also use any other type of formative assessment anytime during the term, including surveys run through a course management system, an alternative survey system like Qualtrics, or departmental activities of review.

During the fall 2018 semester, the Student Instructional Ratings Survey will be revised as discussed above.

- G. In Spring 2019, the new SIRS will be used university-wide. The results will be forwarded to every department for every faculty member. Departments that have advised the Office of Academic Labor Relations that one or more tenure-track faculty will be evaluated for promotion will receive the SIRS results in a format suitable for inclusion on the Form 1-a. Information solicited from questions added to SIRS by schools, departments, or instructors will also be included. Comments will be collected for the end-of-the-term SIRS only if desired by the instructors, department or schools.

IV. . Teaching Evaluation Plans

The core innovation in this new system is the use of a department or school *teaching evaluation plan*. As outlined above, this plan articulates a procedure for evaluating an individual faculty member's teaching using at least three measures: a) data from student instructional rating surveys; b) reports on class observations from one or more colleagues; c) a teaching portfolio (including a teaching statement) prepared by the faculty member. Each plan should specify the frequency of evaluation for each category of faculty member (tenure track, non-tenure track, PTL, or teaching assistant). For example, PTLs might be observed each term, or annually.

The result of a teaching evaluation plan is a summary assessment of an individual faculty member's teaching with *written commentary* compiled by a department chair or Dean and use of a *standards-based rubric* as a basis for recommendation of reappointment, rehiring, tenure, promotion, or post-tenure review.

V. Submission for the promotion and tenure process:

Individual school and departments will be required to produce an overall summary assessment rubric for each faculty member. The rubric will have at least three well-defined standards for good teaching. CTAAR has a collection of best practices and, upon request, will provide schools and departments with models, suggestions, workshops, etc. The Dean is responsible for ensuring that each school and department develops an evaluation rubric.

For each standard, the rubric will clearly explain what actions and outcomes lead to

meeting the standards, and not meeting the standards, including evidence supporting the recommendation.

For example, a department may have three levels of performance for each standard:

Exceeds Expectations, Meets Expectations, Does Not Meet Expectations

In this case, a clear description of what it means for an instructor to Exceed, Meet, or Not Meet expectations must be defined for each teaching standard. For example, the department might have something like:

Meets standards: The instructor engages the students in classroom activities and participation, including course assignments, speaking in class, and asking questions. The instructor also holds regular office hours and meets with students to discuss their progress in the course.

The evidence backing a chosen recommendation must be based on evidence from the entire set of procedures and techniques used in its evaluation (e.g., classroom visits, evaluation of the teaching portfolio, etc.). For the example above, review of course materials by a peer review committee and reports from classroom observations would provide evidence supporting a ‘meets standards’ evaluation for this standard.

VI. Conclusion

The recommendations of the Task Force are intended to provide a basic framework for evaluating teaching while allowing for the needs and characteristics of various disciplines and approaches to teaching. We know that many, if not most, Rutgers faculty are very good teachers, and that others may need assistance in improving their teaching. This framework, and its local adaptations, should enable us to identify and reward good teaching and to help improve teaching, in order to meet the goals of the Strategic Plan to improve our students’ educational experience.

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