
Guidelines for Peer/Non-Student Evaluation of Teaching

Developed by the Teaching and Learning Transformation Center and the Office of Faculty Affairs

OVERVIEW:

Quality in teaching is an important evaluation criterion for promotion and job performance at the University of Maryland. Despite the importance of teaching, the procedures and guidelines for peer or non-student evaluation of teaching are often poorly articulated across campus. Student course evaluations are an important part of judging teaching effectiveness, but such evaluations are also recognized as limited in scope and can be biased by student performance (e.g., course grades) and other factors beyond the instructor's control (e.g., gender, race), so additional sources of information should be considered when evaluating teaching effectiveness.

The APT handbook has long emphasized the importance of "peer" (i.e., non-student) evaluation of teaching, yet specific procedures are not mandated given the variety of teaching models and administrative structures across campus. The Office of Faculty Affairs and Teaching and Learning Transformation Center (TLTC) have developed the following guidelines, best practices, and suggestions for the development of non-student evaluation procedures at the unit level. The goal is to assist Deans, Chairs, and other unit heads with the development of robust and meaningful evaluation procedures of teaching for various purposes, including: 3-yr review of junior faculty; APT dossiers for promotion to Associate or Full Professor; post-tenure review; evaluation and promotion consideration of professional-track faculty; etc. Peer evaluators for tenure-track faculty must include tenured faculty, but may also include other tenure-track or professional track faculty from within the unit, evaluators from outside the unit, current non-enrolled students (trained in evaluation), or former students/alumni not currently enrolled in courses.

GUIDELINES:

1. Effective non-student or peer evaluation of any instructor is best when performed early in the instructor's contract period. Having such evaluation occur in the final semester prior to promotion consideration will often do little to assist the instructor, and provides little information for the unit. Having the process of peer evaluation become part of the culture of the unit is important; an expectation for all instructors at all stages and ranks, but most especially important for instructors new to the unit. For tenure-track faculty, emphasize the importance of such evaluation as part of the 3-year review, which will ensure evaluation prior to the tenure evaluation.
2. Effective non-student or peer evaluation is best performed using repeated interactions with the course instructor over time, and should include more than classroom attendance and observation/evaluation. Direct evaluation of the teaching materials, syllabi, assignments, activities, assessments, etc., allows for appraisal of the quality and breadth/depth of the course content. Evaluation of classroom management, pedagogies, etc., is equally important, as junior faculty often have little training in these techniques. As such, evaluations at multiple times within a course offering (e.g., reviewing materials and attending class sessions on more than one occasion), and evaluations of multiple course offerings can

provide excellent information for the unit and instructor about teaching effectiveness and improvement over time.

3. Student course evaluations are an important part of evaluating teaching effectiveness and peer evaluators may want to review those evaluations with the instructor. Peer evaluators may be able to interpret student course evaluations, which may include mediocre ratings on certain course components. These poorer ratings could be "sour grapes", but they also may reflect inadequacies in course content (e.g., lack of depth) or poor instructor performance or class management. Conversely, very high ratings can indicate excellence, but may also reflect weaknesses in the course, especially if the course is "easy" and students receive high grades for little effort. Student course evaluations provide imperfect information on teaching effectiveness, but the peer evaluation process can allow for careful review and contextualization of these materials (both quantitative and qualitative student feedback) to help provide insight into teaching effectiveness. The comments generated by student evaluations (i.e., beyond the quantitative rankings) are especially helpful in this process.
4. Evaluation rubrics are recommended for peer evaluators, if only to assist evaluators with recognizing the various areas of instruction that should be considered in their evaluations. Peer evaluators can be trained in the review process either by their unit, school, or campus (e.g., TLTC). The use of rubrics allows for very specific feedback for the instructor under evaluation, as well as for clearer evidence of change in performance over time with repeated evaluation.
5. Evaluation of course content (e.g., learning outcomes, reading lists, activities, assignments, assessments) is best performed by a peer evaluator with expertise in the content area of the course. Moreover, for courses that provide foundational information for higher-level courses (e.g., 101 course that leads to 102 or 201), evaluation of the content as it relates to required skills/knowledge for those subsequent courses can be considered. Alignment of the learning outcomes of the course in relation to the program's degree competencies may also be considered in the evaluation. Such expert evaluation may come from experts off-campus at peer institutions; however, having such an evaluation come late in the promotion timeline and as a one-time review of course materials may be ineffective.
6. Where possible, evaluation of student learning can be a tremendous benefit to the evidence of teaching effectiveness. Student learning might be assessed within a course (e.g., performance on projects or examinations), or perhaps in student performance in later, related coursework. Incorporation of the unit's learning outcomes assessment procedures into the instructor evaluation can be an effective way to address student learning directly.
7. Evaluation of classroom management, pedagogies, presentation of course materials, etc., may be effectively performed by peer reviewers who are not expert with the content of the course, but who are well-versed (and possibly trained) in evaluating such components. Such evaluations can provide valuable insights for instructors to improve teaching performance and student learning beyond any adjustments to the course content. In fact, such a review is often useful for evaluation of student comprehension of challenging material, as a non-expert reviewer will be able to reflect on the instructor's ability to teach challenging concepts and assess student knowledge and performance.
8. The instructor under evaluation, over the course of several semesters, is likely best served through review by 2-3 evaluators, rather than only one or by many. Repeated review by

these evaluators will allow for several opportunities for feedback and suggestions for improvement, as well as for assessment of changes in teaching effectiveness over time. Recognize also that instructors will have different strengths/weaknesses and will take different paths toward improvement; one size does not “fit all” with regard to excellence in teaching and promoting student learning.

9. The teaching portfolio of any instructor being considered for promotion may include a summary letter of the evaluation processes performed as part of the peer evaluation process. Rather than submission of multiple evaluation rubrics, each peer evaluator may write a summary assessment of the process of evaluation, the number and type of interactions the evaluator had with the instructor and course, and an overall appraisal of the instructor’s teaching effectiveness and response to the evaluation process. The peer evaluator is also in an excellent position to interpret and contextualize the student course evaluations in a summary letter.
10. Of note for junior tenure-track faculty: Junior tenure-track faculty whose teaching is peer-evaluated by tenured faculty within their unit have the potential for receiving a biased review, in that these tenured faculty will vote directly on their promotion and tenure application, and, by writing a letter of evaluation, will likely be contributing material directly to the teaching portfolio. Unit heads will want to give careful consideration to the selection of the peer evaluators for junior tenure-track faculty, and may choose to select tenured faculty evaluators with related expertise to the course content from outside the unit.