

Evaluating a Faculty Member's Teaching

Guidelines for Preparing a Case for Renewal/Tenure/Promotion

A. Introduction

The University of Notre Dame strives to recruit, cultivate, recognize and reward faculty members who both are engaged in significant scholarly pursuits and are highly effective teachers. Departments and schools contribute to this effort by fostering communities of collegial support and intellectual exchange that help faculty scholars, at all stages of their careers, identify ways to improve their practice of teaching and enhance student learning.

The University has adopted a systematic and widely accepted peer-review structure for evaluating scholarly work. As a complement, the guidelines presented here offer a reliable and adaptable means to assess the quality of a faculty member's teaching. Departments and schools are encouraged to align their criteria for the evaluation of teaching with the principles of effective teaching, so as to:

- Promote a shared understanding among the faculty in each department/school of models for, and characteristics of, exemplary teaching within their discipline
- Improve the quality of teaching at Notre Dame by encouraging faculty members to reflect on how their own teaching embodies explicit elements of good practice
- Ensure that high-stakes decisions involving faculty advancement are informed by, among other things, a comprehensive assessment of the candidate's teaching

In April 1999, a subcommittee of Notre Dame's Academic Council delivered a thought-provoking report, entitled "Evaluating Teaching at Notre Dame."¹ Within that document, the University community was encouraged to adopt a multifaceted approach when evaluating a faculty member's teaching for the purpose of deciding advancement cases, i.e., renewal, tenure and promotion decisions. In 2006, the *Advisory Committee to the Provost on the Evaluation of Teaching*,² in consultation with Academic Council, Faculty Senate, the Provost's Advisory Committee and the Deans' Cabinet, developed a tangible framework to operationalize many of the principles espoused in the 1999 report. The following guidelines provide departments/schools with a comprehensive yet flexible approach for evaluating the quality of a faculty member's teaching – both in conventional course environments (Sect. B) and through the candidate's other contributions to student learning (Sect. C).

¹ The document, "Evaluating Teaching at Notre Dame," is available by contacting the Associate Provost for Faculty Affairs, Office of the Provost, University of Notre Dame.

² Members of the *Advisory Committee to the Provost on the Evaluation of Teaching* included Philippe Collon, Don Crafton, Patrick Flynn, Tom Frecka, Alex Hahn, Dennis Jacobs, Jean Ann Linney, Patricia Maurice, Jim McKenna, Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe, and John Robinson.

B. Comprehensive Evaluation of Teaching in Select Courses

Teaching takes many forms; yet, the credit-bearing course remains the most typical way in which teaching is practiced within the academy. A summative review of a candidate's teaching record includes an in-depth evaluation of select courses/sections that the candidate has taught in recent years.³

Notre Dame employs the Course Instructor Feedback (CIF) system as a universal mechanism for gathering student perceptions about each course and its instructor.⁴ Although students are well qualified to judge certain aspects of teaching, e.g., how clear, well-organized, and responsive an instructor is, CIF ratings are incapable of revealing, for example, the appropriateness of course content, the contribution a course makes to the overall curriculum, or the standards by which students are evaluated and graded. Hence, a comprehensive evaluation of teaching needs to balance (a) an analysis of CIF scores⁵ for all courses taught during the review period with (b) an in-depth evaluation of representative courses chosen by the department/school.³ As a framework to help the department/school conduct its comprehensive review, the following four elements should be fully addressed for each course the department/school chooses to evaluate in depth.

1. **COURSE DESIGN:** Are the learning goals for the course meaningful and clearly articulated? Is the course design rigorous, current, relevant to students' needs, and where appropriate, consonant with the program's curricular requirements?
2. **IMPLEMENTATION:** Does the faculty member create a stimulating environment that is conducive to learning and effective in the use of students' time? Are students being inspired and encouraged to think analytically and creatively, and to develop knowledge, skills, and habits of mind appropriate to the discipline?
3. **EVALUATION OF STUDENT WORK:** Does the faculty member employ reliable balanced approaches for assessing a student's achievement of the course learning goals? Does the faculty member set high expectations for student performance, provide students with helpful feedback throughout the course, and apply appropriate standards when evaluating student work?
4. **STUDENT PERCEPTIONS:** Do the students perceive themselves to be well taught by the faculty member? Are the students more than satisfied with their learning experience in the course?

³ The department/school is responsible for specifying, in advance, the optimal number of courses or sections to be examined in-depth and the process by which these courses are to be chosen. Ideally, the selected courses should represent an appropriate sample from the three years immediately preceding the review; the selected courses should illustrate the candidate's intellectual contributions to teaching and reflect the variety of students (e.g., graduate, undergraduate, majors, non-majors) that the candidate has taught.

⁴ For more information about the CIFs, consult <http://cif.nd.edu/>.

⁵ An analysis of CIF scores reflects the distribution of responses across the entire set of CIF questions.

Just as the culture and curriculum are distinctive in every academic department/school, the qualities of effective teaching are often discipline-specific and are discerned only through careful review by faculty peers. In presenting a balanced assessment of the candidate's teaching, the department/school should address, at a minimum, all four sets of questions as they apply to each of the courses/sections selected for in-depth review. The department/school should formulate its response to each question by analyzing credible evidence gathered from appropriate sources, e.g., the faculty candidate, students in the selected courses, and faculty peers.⁶

C. Appraisal of Additional Contributions to Teaching

Recognizing that classroom teaching may represent only a portion of the candidate's educational activities, the department/school should appraise any important ways in which the faculty candidate has gone beyond his/her conventional teaching responsibilities to enrich the student learning experience and/or advance the teaching mission of the department, school, college or university. Examples of such contributions include: formal or informal student mentoring; facilitating student participation in experiential learning opportunities, such as research, fieldwork, or scholarly or creative endeavors; directing students' theses; and the introduction of significant innovations within the curriculum. Contributions that lead to noteworthy student achievements (e.g., publications, performances, exhibitions, placements, and awards) should be highlighted.

D. Conclusion

The candidate's department/school is responsible for conducting a comprehensive evaluation of the candidate's teaching in accordance with the guidelines outlined here.⁷ The resulting teaching report should present an unbiased assessment of the candidate's strengths and weaknesses as a teacher, as manifested in (i) the candidate's CIF ratings over the entire review period, (ii) an in-depth review of select courses taught by the candidate, and (iii) the candidate's record of additional contributions to student learning. The teaching report serves to inform the CAP in its deliberations on the candidate's overall case for advancement. Notre Dame's Academic Articles state that a candidate for associate professor should, among other things, "have demonstrated outstanding teaching ability," and that a candidate for full professor "should have maintained excellence in teaching." The purpose of these guidelines is to ensure that the process for judging whether a candidate has met these criteria is clearly articulated, reliable, adaptable to disciplinary context, and universally applied.

⁶ Examples of the types of evidence that might prove useful in addressing each of the four sets of questions can be found at <https://provost.nd.edu/administrative-resources/guidelines/#teaching>.

⁷ According to the Academic Articles of the University, the Committee on Appointments and Promotions (CAP) is responsible for formally recommending a faculty candidate for reappointment or promotion. Hence, the summative evaluation of a candidate's teaching falls under the purview of the CAP. If, however, the CAP judges that the teaching report would be better prepared by a separate committee of well-qualified faculty, such a committee can be constituted as long as it is explicitly permitted within the CAP document ratified by the department/school.