

Statement on Teaching Evaluation

The statement that follows was prepared by the Association's Committee on Teaching, Research, and Publication. It was adopted by the Association's Council in June 1975 and endorsed by the Sixty-first Annual Meeting. In April 1990, the Council adopted several changes in language that had been approved by the Committee on Teaching, Research, and Publication in order to remove gender-specific references from the original text.

In response to a chronic need for arriving at fair judgments of a faculty member's teaching, the Association sets forth this statement as a guide to proper teaching evaluation methods and their appropriate uses in personnel decisions. This statement confines itself to the teaching responsibilities of college and university professors and is not intended as the definitive statement on reviewing and weighing all aspects of a faculty member's work. In addressing itself to teaching, the statement has no intention of minimizing the importance of other faculty responsibilities. There is a need for assessment of a teacher's scholarship both more precise and more extensive than commonly employed. There is a need to define service and the value attached to it as well as to review carefully the kind and quality of service performed by faculty members. Additional guidance in the complex task of reviewing faculty service is to be found in other Association documents: the *Statement on Procedural Standards in the Renewal or Nonrenewal of Faculty Appointments*, the *Recommended Institutional Regulations on Academic Freedom and Tenure*, the *Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities*, and the *Statement on Faculty Workload*.

Statement

Colleges and universities properly aspire to excellence in teaching. Institutional aspirations, however, have not often led to practices that clearly identify and reward teaching excellence, and the quality of teaching is not in fact the determining consideration in many decisions on retention, promotion, salary, and tenure. The aspirations of faculty members are often frustrated, because they must wrestle with diverse obligations—commonly identified as *teaching*, *research*, and *service*—placed upon them by the profession at large, the scholarly discipline, the institution, and their own varied interests. Establishing a positive relationship between the institution's and the department's aspirations and the individual's competencies and aims is one outcome of fair and thorough faculty review procedures.

1. *Institutional Values and Policies.* Making clear the expectations the institution places upon the teacher and providing the conditions and support necessary to excellent teaching are primary institutional obligations. It is a first order of business that institutions declare their values and communicate them with sufficient clarity to enable colleges and departments to set forth specific expectations as to teaching, research, and service, and to make clear any other faculty obligations. Both institution-wide and college or department policies on promotion, salary, and tenure should be written and subject to periodic review, a process in which faculty members must play a central part.
2. *Expectations, Criteria, and Procedures.* At the college or department level the expectations as to teaching, the weighting of teaching in relation to other expectations, and the criteria and procedures by which the fulfillment of these expectations is to be judged should be put in writing and periodically reviewed by all members of the college or department. This policy statement should specify the information that is to be gathered for all faculty members, the basic procedures to be followed in gathering it, and the time schedule for various aspects of the review process. Such information should include first-hand data from various sources, including students, and should emphasize the primacy of faculty colleague judgments of teaching effectiveness at the first level of review and recommendation.

3. *Adequate Evaluation Data.* Casual procedures, a paucity of data, and unilateral judgments by department chairs and deans too often characterize the evaluation of teaching in American colleges and universities. Praiseworthy and systematic efforts to improve the processes of teaching evaluation have moved toward identifying characteristics of effective teaching and recognizing and weighting the multiple aspects of an individual teacher's performance. A judicious evaluation of a college professor as teacher should include: (a) an accurate factual description of what an individual does as teacher, (b) various measures of the effectiveness of these efforts, and (c) fair consideration of the relation between these efforts and the institution's and the department's expectations and support.

An important and often overlooked element of evaluating teaching is an accurate description of a professor's teaching. Such a description should include the number and level and kinds of classes taught, the numbers of students, and out-of-class activities related to teaching. Such data should be very carefully considered both to guard against drawing unwarranted conclusions and to increase the possibilities of fairly comparing workloads and kinds of teaching, of clarifying expectations, and of identifying particulars of minimum and maximum performance. Other useful information might include evidence of the ability of a teacher to shape new courses, to reach different levels and kinds of students, to develop effective teaching strategies, and to contribute to the effectiveness of the individual's and the institution's instruction in other ways than in the classroom.

The gathering of such data can promote a careful consideration of both the institution's and the department's values. If a department, for example, places great value upon teaching large numbers of lower-level students, that value should be reflected in the judgments about teachers who perform such tasks effectively. Too often, even at the simple point of numbers and kinds of students taught, departments and institutions operate on value assumptions seldom made clear to the faculty.

Another kind of data that should be systematically gathered and examined by the teacher's colleagues includes course syllabi, tests, materials, and methods employed in instruction. Care should be taken that such scrutiny not inhibit the teacher, limit the variety of effective teaching styles, or discourage purposeful innovation. Evidence of a concern for teaching and teaching competence demonstrated in publications, attendance at meetings, delivery of lectures, and consulting should also be included among the essential information to be reviewed.

4. *Assessing the Effectiveness of Instruction.*

Student learning. Evaluation of teaching usually refers to efforts made to assess the effectiveness of instruction. The most valid measure is probably the most difficult to obtain, that is, the assessment of a teacher's effectiveness on the basis of the learning of his or her students. On the one hand, a student's learning is importantly influenced by much more than an individual teacher's efforts. On the other, measures of before-and-after learning are difficult to find, control, or compare. From a practical point of view, the difficulties of evaluating college teaching on the basis of changes in student performance limit the use of such a measure. The difficulties, however, should not rule out all efforts to seek reliable evidence of this kind.

Teaching performance. Evaluating teaching on the basis of teaching performance also presents difficulties in measurement, but the large body of research into the reliability and validity of carefully applied performance measures supports the practical usefulness of these data. Data on teaching performance commonly come from trained observers, faculty colleagues, and students.

Student perceptions. Student perceptions are a prime source of information from those who must be affected if learning is to take place. Student responses can provide continuing insights into a number of the important dimensions of a teacher's efforts: classroom performance, advising, and informal and formal contacts with students outside of class. A variety of ways are available to gather student opinion, ranging from informal questioning of individual students about details of a specific course to campus-wide questionnaires.

Faculty members should be meaningfully involved in any systematic efforts to obtain student opinion. Cooperation among students, faculty, and administration is necessary to secure teaching performance data that can be relied upon. No one questionnaire or method is suitable to every department or institution. Different kinds of questionnaires can be useful in assessing different kinds of courses and subject matters and in meeting the need for information of a particular kind. However, a common instrument covering a range of teachers, departments, and subject matter areas has the great advantage of affording meaningful comparative data. The important consideration is to obtain reliable data over a range of teaching assignments and over a period of time. Evaluations in which results go only to the individual professor may be of use in improving an individual teacher's performance, but they contribute little to the process of faculty review. Student input need not be limited by course evaluations. Exit interviews, questionnaires to alumni, and face-to-face discussion are other ways in which student feedback can be profitably gathered.

Classroom visitation. Because of the usefulness of having first-hand information about an individual's teaching effectiveness, some institutions have adopted a program of classroom visitation. There are various ways of having colleagues visit classrooms, but such visits do not necessarily yield reliable data. Careful observations over a period of time may, however, be useful in evaluating instruction and in fostering effective teaching. Clearly, there must be an understanding among the visitors and the visited upon such matters as who does the visiting, how many visits are made, what visitors look for, what feedback is given to the visited, and what other use is made of the information.

Self-evaluation. Some institutions draw upon self-evaluation as an element in assessing teaching. The limitations on self-evaluation are obvious, and neither the teacher nor the institution should be satisfied with self-evaluation alone. However, faculty members as individuals or as members of committees can assist colleagues in making the kind of self-evaluation which constitutes a contribution to improving and evaluating teaching. Arousing an interest in self-examination, structuring self-evaluations so that they might afford more reliable data, and giving faculty members the opportunity to assess their own teaching effectiveness and to add their own interpretation of student ratings and classroom visitations can increase the usefulness of self-evaluation as a part of the review process.

Outside opinions. Some institutions seek outside opinions and judgments as to a professor's competence. Reliable outside judgments about an individual's teaching, however, are difficult to secure. It would be a mistake to suppose that a college teacher's scholarly reputation is an accurate measure of teaching ability. Visiting teams from the outside, given ample time to observe the teacher, to talk with students, and to examine relevant data, might prove a useful, though expensive, means of improving the quality of evaluation. Information and opinions from faculty members in other departments and from persons outside the university should be sought when an individual's teaching assignment and the informant's first-hand knowledge appear to justify their use.

5. *Procedures.* The emphasis in evaluation should be upon obtaining first-hand evidence of teaching competence, which is most likely to be found among the faculty of a department or college and the students who receive instruction. Evaluation of teaching in which an administrator's judgment is the sole or determining factor is contrary to policies set forth in the *Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities*.

The institution's commitment to teaching should be manifested in concrete ways. For example, some institutions have adopted policies that make recommendations for promotion unacceptable unless they provide strong and convincing evidence of teaching competence. Combining the systematic evaluation of teaching with direct efforts to assist teachers in developing their effectiveness is another example of institutional commitment. It is the responsibility of the institution and the colleges, departments, or other instructional divisions to establish and maintain written policies and procedures that ensure a sound basis for individual judgments fairly applied to all.

Faculty members should have a primary, though not exclusive, role in evaluating an individual faculty member's performance as teacher. Factual data, student opinion, and colleague judgments should be central in the formal procedures for review which should involve faculty discussion and vote. Those being evaluated should be invited to supply information and materials relevant to that evaluation. If the department does not have final authority, the faculty's considered judgment should constitute the basic recommendation to the next level of responsibility, which may be a college-wide or university-wide faculty committee. If the chair's recommendation is contrary to that of the department faculty, the faculty should be informed of the chair's reasons prior to the chair's submitting his or her recommendation and that of the faculty and should be given an opportunity to respond to the chair's views.

The dean's function, where separate from that of a chair or division head, is typically one of review and recommendation either in the dean's own person or through an official review body at that level. If the recommendation at this level is contrary to that of the department chair or faculty, opportunity should be provided for discussion with the chair or faculty before a formal recommendation is made.

Final decisions should be made in accordance with the *Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities*: "The governing board and president should, on questions of faculty status, as in other matters where the faculty has primary responsibility, concur with the faculty judgment except in rare instances and for compelling reasons which should be stated in detail."¹ Procedures in accordance with the Association's *Recommended Institutional Regulations on Academic Freedom and Tenure* and the *Statement on Procedural Standards in the Renewal or Nonrenewal of Faculty Appointments* should be provided to handle faculty grievances arising from advancement recommendations.

6. *Some Further Implications.* The responsible evaluation of teaching does not serve advancement procedures alone. It should be wisely employed for the development of the teacher and the enhancement of instruction. Both of these aims can be served by the presence of a faculty committee charged with the overall responsibility of remaining conversant with the research in evaluating teaching and of providing assistance in maintaining sound policies and procedures in reviewing faculty performance. The full dimensions of teaching should not be slighted in the desire to arrive at usable data and systematic practices. Though teaching can be considered apart from scholarship and service, the general recognition of these three professional obligations suggests that the relationships are important. The kind of teaching that distinguishes itself in colleges and universities is integral with scholarship, has a way of getting outside classroom confines, and may exemplify the highest meaning of service. A judicious evaluation system would recognize the broad dimensions of teaching, be sensitive to different kinds and styles of instruction, and be as useful in distinguishing superior teaching from the merely competent as in identifying poor teaching.

Note

1. AAUP, *Policy Documents and Reports*, 10th ed. (Washington, D.C., 2006), 139.