

## Evaluation of Teaching: What the Research Says PART 1

Evaluation of teaching has always been a sensitive and sometimes controversial issue. At a time where most departments are rewriting their DAC's, it seems only appropriate to take a look at what the research has to say about common practices for evaluating effective teaching. It may not come as a surprise that those practices do not always provide the most valid results and that more valid results come at a cost ... mainly of more time invested. But with a little more effort common practices can be enhanced, while generating the added value of helping instructors improve their teaching. Here are the main points:<sup>1</sup>

- Teaching can only be properly assessed if the assessors (say, within a given department) agree on what they consider to be effective teaching at certain course levels and in certain types of courses.
- While there is no commonly accepted definition of effective teaching, there are some general principles with which most scholars on college teaching tend to agree.
- Teaching consists of more than classroom performance. Student learning is equally influenced by good course design, subject matter mastery, instructor-availability to students, and development of a coherent curriculum.
- Unfortunately, the most common methods for evaluating teaching focus almost exclusively on classroom performance and thereby leave out many components that determine student learning outcomes.
- Student evaluations of teaching (using appropriate instruments and procedures) have been shown to be more valid and reliable than other commonly used techniques, especially peer evaluations.

This is the first part of our recommendations from the literature. The second part will be out in print next week, but it is already available online at [www.neiu.edu/~ctl/bulletin.html](http://www.neiu.edu/~ctl/bulletin.html). We start with some references to defining effective teaching.

### Useful Criteria for Evaluating Teaching

Different disciplines require different methods and settings for instruction, which should result in different methods and criteria used for evaluation.<sup>2</sup> In addition, even within a discipline instructional methods will differ between classroom formats such as lecture, discussion, lab, small group interaction, studio, etc. Research on classroom performance (focusing on lecture and discussion formats) has widely converged on categories of good teaching that include: Good organization and planning, Teacher-student interaction or rapport, Clarity and effective communication, Flexibility of teaching approaches, Impartial evaluation of students, Enthusiasm for subject and teaching.<sup>3</sup> Advocates for student-centered teaching have embraced Chickering and Gamson's (1987) Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education, some of which go beyond the classroom context. According to these principles, learner-centered teachers: (1) Encourage contact between students and faculty in and out of classes; (2) Develop reciprocity and cooperation among students; (3) Encourage active learning that involves regular opportunities to talk, write, and relate course content to daily lives; (4) Give prompt feedback and

suggestions for improvement; (5) Emphasize time on task and effective time management; (6) Communicate high expectations; and (7) Respect diverse talents and learning styles.<sup>4</sup> Lists such as these can serve as discussion starters for departments to come to an agreement on what members of the department will recognize as elements of good teaching.

The following table presents the relative strengths of four commonly used evaluation tools and their best use for generating data on different aspects of teaching. There are certainly other ways of breaking down teaching skills, and the evaluation tools can be made to cover them somewhat differently as well. But the overall picture remains largely the same: Each evaluation tool only addresses a limited proportion of teaching effectiveness. While there is some overlap, multiple methods will be needed to provide a full account of how effective a given instructor is as a teacher.

TABLE: Contributions of Different Evaluation Tools

| Teaching Aspect   | Student Eval's | Peer Observ. | Document Review | Portfolio |
|---|----------------|--------------|-----------------|-----------|
| 1. Teacher triggers students' interests   | ✓              | ✓            |                 |           |
| 2. Teacher motivates students to learn  | ✓              |              |                 |           |
| 3. Teacher is easy to understand by students                                    | ✓              | ✓            |                 |           |
| 4. Students feel challenged by teacher  | ✓              |              |                 |           |
| 5. Teacher organizes material and class activities well                         |                | ✓            |                 |           |
| 6. Teacher has good rapport with students                                       | ✓              | ✓            |                 |           |
| 7. Teacher has good command of the subject matter                               |                | ✓            | ✓               |           |
| 8. Teacher uses an appropriate variety of instructional methods                 |                | ✓            |                 | (✓)       |
| 9. Teacher reacts to student needs/classroom demands w/ flexibility             |                | ✓            |                 |           |
| 10. Teacher has created a coherent course design                                |                |              | ✓               | ✓         |
| 11. Teacher's assessment of student learning is fair                            |                |              | ✓               |           |
| 12. Teacher's assessment criteria are meaningful                                |                |              | ✓               | ✓         |
| 13. Assessment shows evidence of achievement of learning outcomes               |                |              | ✓               |           |
| 14. Teacher communicates well in writing (when giving instructions or feedback) | ✓              |              | ✓               | ✓         |
| 15. Teacher mentors students outside the classroom                              |                |              |                 | ✓         |
| 16. Teacher shows growth in teaching abilities                                  |                |              |                 | ✓         |
| 17. Teacher demonstrates an understanding of the students' background           |                |              |                 | ✓         |

### Further Information

Next week's second part on this topic will discuss the research on the four data sources listed in the above table: Student evaluations, peer observations, document review, and teaching portfolios. A wealth of information exists on issues of teaching evaluations, much of it by now in condensed version on the Web.<sup>5</sup> The Center for Teaching and Learning is happy to provide additional input. Contact us at ex. 4468 or [e-hansen@neu.edu](mailto:e-hansen@neu.edu).

<sup>1</sup> For a short essay on these topics, see: [www.ou.edu/idp/tips/ideas/evaluation.htm](http://www.ou.edu/idp/tips/ideas/evaluation.htm); for a thorough review of the literature, see R.A. Arreola, 2000. *Developing a Comprehensive Faculty Evaluation System, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.* Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing.

<sup>2</sup> See Guidelines for Evaluating Teaching: [www.crlt.umich.edu/crlttext/guidelinestext.html](http://www.crlt.umich.edu/crlttext/guidelinestext.html)

<sup>3</sup> See Kansas State's Idea Paper #32: [www.idea.ksu.edu/resources/Papers.html](http://www.idea.ksu.edu/resources/Papers.html), U.C.-Santa Barbara: <http://www.oic.id.ucsb.edu/Resources/Teaching/GoodTeaching.html>, and Student Evaluation of Teaching: <http://ctl.unc.edu/fyc16.html>

<sup>4</sup> For more detail, see [www.byu.edu/fc/pages/tchltnpages/7princip.html](http://www.byu.edu/fc/pages/tchltnpages/7princip.html). For a self-evaluation instrument, see: [www.unh.edu/teaching-excellence-9](http://www.unh.edu/teaching-excellence-9)

<sup>5</sup> For an excellent meta-website of such literature, see: [www.tlc.eku.edu/tips/evaluating\\_teaching/](http://www.tlc.eku.edu/tips/evaluating_teaching/)