

Unit 8

Evaluating Teaching

Objectives:

- Know what to evaluate in your teaching.
- Know different methods for evaluating teaching.
- Design a formative evaluation to get feedback while your course is in progress.
- Design an end-of-semester evaluation for your course.

Purposes of Evaluation

This is the model that we are using to guide you through this book:

Philosophy > Objectives > Methods > Learning > Evaluation > Reflection.

Evaluation of teaching provides a way for teachers to discover what is working and what might be changed to become more effective. It is a way to document strategies that are successful, so that over time the likelihood of successes increases. Evaluation of teaching helps us to create the best environments and strategies to maximize student learning. While we may share some results of our evaluations with others for reasons we will discuss shortly, a major way we personally use results from evaluation of our teaching is to assist us in our own professional and personal development as teachers.

Personnel Decisions

Evaluation data often are used to determine annual salary increments, and for promotion and tenure decisions (Hoyt & Pallet, 1999). These personnel decisions are significant for many reasons beyond the associated implications for one's career. Answers to serious questions like "How comfortable will I be financially during trying economic times?" or "Do I have a stable occupation that will help sustain my quality of life for years to come?" can weigh heavily on the minds of academicians. They can also impact one's self-image.

Evidence for a Job Search

Evaluation data can help substantiate teaching experience and success when applying for an academic position that includes teaching responsibilities. When you develop a teaching evaluation plan, keep in mind that prospective employers and potential colleagues will want to get a comprehensive picture of all aspects of your teaching in summary form. One way to do this

is through a teaching portfolio. Unit 10 will focus on developing a teaching portfolio, and evaluation data will be an important part of your portfolio.

Evidence of Professional Development

For the purposes of your development as a teacher, the evaluation process should be as extensive and unbiased as possible and allow you to make well-informed decisions about how well you are teaching and what aspects you might want to improve. By examining an archive of your evaluations you can track your development as a teacher using evidence based standards and document your development as an educator. Creating a teaching portfolio is one way to organize and archive your evaluations from year to year. Developing a teaching portfolio requires not only documentation of your teaching effectiveness but thoughtful reflection on your teaching.

What to Evaluate

Teaching is a highly complex human activity that is not easy to describe or judge. Evaluation of teaching involves much more than the average scores on end-of-semester student rating forms. Rather, it should include multiple components and offer a detailed picture of who you are as a teacher and how you got there. There are a variety of aspects of teaching that could be evaluated such as your syllabus and materials, communication skills, methods of testing and grading, and student learning outcomes (Cashin, 1989, Table 1).

Given all the possibilities, how do you decide what to evaluate? By this time in our program, one answer should leap to mind immediately -- use your philosophy of teaching as a guide.

How will you decide what dimensions of your teaching to evaluate? You might also consult articles and books, conference workshops on teaching, university teaching centers, and colleagues. All these resources can help you identify the most important dimensions of your teaching. If your school has a teaching center we encourage you to use their services, and we strongly suggest taking advantage of opportunities to attend teaching conferences and workshops such as those offered by your professional organizations or more general ones, such as the annual [Teaching Professor conference](#). Elon University maintains an up-to-date [online listing of such conferences](#).

Goals of the Course

In Unit 3 on planning a course we discussed the important of stating specific course goals. Doing that should provide you with some clear direction in developing an evaluation plan. Some of your goals will relate to student performance – what students know and are able to do. Other goals may relate to class dynamics; for example, having students participate in class

discussions. Still other goals may relate to student thinking and evaluation styles – offering opportunities for students to think critically and synthesize information effectively. Success in achieving these goals can also be viewed through the lens of your success as a teacher, and become an aspect of evaluating your teaching.

Student Feedback

Students often contribute a major portion of your evaluation data. Throughout the semester students can serve as a resource to help you decide what to evaluate with respect to your teaching. Student feedback can be obtained in a variety of systematic ways as well as informal ways such as talking with students before or after class, and asking questions such as: "How do you think our discussion went last time?" "What do you think could have been improved about class today to help you understand the topic?" If you have established a good rapport with your students, they will be honest with you.

Your own Experience

With experience you will be able to discern which perspectives may be most helpful to you and to draw your own general conclusions about what is important with your teaching. For example, Jim uses an article by Murray (1983) who concludes that enthusiasm and rapport are the two most basic dimensions of teaching, so Jim wants to be sure to evaluate himself on those dimensions. Jason believes strongly that in order for life long learning to occur, students have to start the process by thinking and analyzing information outside of class, thus one of his goals is to be available to students outside of class. Therefore, it is important for him to evaluate students' perceptions of his availability. Mary believes it is important to show respect for her students' experiences, ideas and struggles as learners. Her success in doing this is an important consideration as she evaluates her teaching.

Activity:

Use your philosophy to find those statements that identify the aspects of teaching that are most important to you. For example, you might value the diversity of your students or having them become critical thinkers. Think about how you might go about evaluating your progress in adhering to these important principles. This exercise should set the stage for best understanding and eventually implementing material covered in subsequent sections of this unit.

Evaluation Methods

There are many methods available for evaluating teaching as we mentioned earlier in this unit. We have found it helpful to use multiple methods when evaluating our teaching and encourage you to do the same when evaluating your teaching.

Evaluating before the first day of class

Evaluation can happen even before a course begins. Just as a scientist can evaluate a research design in terms of its adequacy as a test of a hypothesis based on a theory, you can do the same even before a course begins. In teaching, your hypothesis is that your methods will result in student learning and the theory on which it is based is your teaching philosophy.

Activity: Planning for evaluating a course

Review your teaching philosophy as it applies to one particular course. Consider a course that you are teaching for the first time or one that you find most challenging to teach. Does your course plan reflect your philosophy? Write a narrative to accompany the syllabus that gives your rationale for the plan based on your philosophy. How are your course goals, class activities, and assessment methods linked to your philosophy? Show your syllabus with the narrative to a colleague for a critique.

Evaluating Teaching in Progress

Some of what we do when we evaluate teaching while a course is in progress is the same as the formative assessment we discussed in Unit 7. In that Unit the focus was on finding out

what students know; here we are concerned with evaluating what we, as teachers, are doing to facilitate that learning.

The *Classroom Assessment Techniques* (CATs) (Angelo & Cross, 1993) presented in Unit 7 also apply here. Most of the techniques provide you with immediate feedback and do not take much time to prepare, administer, and process. If you use CATs to evaluate teaching consider adding a question that specifically asks about your teaching. For example, one CAT asks, “What was the muddiest point in today’s class?” You might add, “What could the teacher have done to make this clearer?”

Another approach that can be used regularly throughout a course is The Critical Incident Questionnaire developed by Brookfield (1990). This questionnaire invites the students to reflect on the week’s classes and identify moments when they were most engaged and most distanced by what was happening in the class. In addition, students are asked to identify specific actions (by teacher or students) that they found most helpful or affirming, most puzzling and most surprising.

Early term evaluation. We suggest doing a general evaluation about one-third of the way through a course to see how things are going. Ask students to write their answers to these questions:

- What is going well in class?
- What things can we improve? Note the use of the word, we, to indicate that improvement is the joint responsibility of teachers and students

Responses to those two questions should provide sufficient information to gauge how the course is going, unless there is a particular issue you want to learn about. For example, in the case where you are trying a new technique and want to be sure all students comment on its

effectiveness, you will want to include a question on the new technique. A variation to this evaluation technique is to invite a colleague or a staff member from your campus's teacher center (if your school has a center) to conduct a focus group in which students respond to those same questions. Students are often more comfortable and honest when these sessions, often called Small Group Instructional Feedback sessions (SGIF), are conducted in a setting where they are anonymous and can't be identified through handwriting. When using this early-term evaluation it is important to let students know what you learned and what you will do with the results. There are some student suggestions that you cannot follow (put windows in the room) or will not follow (don't make us learn these terms). Other suggestions are good ones and you should adopt them as soon as you can (speak louder, use more examples). Some suggestions or recommendations might require clarification or discussion with the class. These discussions are worth pursuing, at least for a few minutes of class time. Students appreciate receiving your feedback on their comments and it demonstrates your concern about creating the best learning experience for them.

Observation. "You can observe a lot by watching," is one of those humorously profound quotations from Yogi Berra. One of the least helpful evaluations occurs when a friend visits your class and later says, "That was a really good class. I liked your examples." These general, friendly pats on the back are of little value in the absence of perceptive, constructive criticism.

Observation is likely to be more helpful if it is directed at specific aspects of teaching, rather than general impressions. The loudness of my speech and my use of examples is not only a matter of opinion, but behavior that can be observed. There are several ways of getting at these specifics, each of which involves the application of some system of observation categories. Appendix 8A presents categories that Jim has used. Other resources that you might find helpful

are Perlman and McCann's extensive [overview of peer review of teaching](#) (available online), and *Peer Review of Teaching: A Sourcebook* (Chism, 2007).

Videotaping. Videotaping has the advantage of capturing your teaching in a format so that you can view it and that can be repeated or interrupted for analysis and discussion. Some individuals find being videotaped a frightening or even threatening prospect. The discomfort felt when facing a video camera usually goes away as the teacher becomes involved in the class. If that does not happen, it may help to tape two or three classes until the teacher becomes accustomed to the presence of the camera. Permission from students should be obtained in advance if they will be included in the taping. Students who do not want to be taped should be seated out of camera range.

The teacher should review the tape alone the first time to get over the emotional reactions that tend to result from viewing one's self in action: "Oh, look at my hair." or "I shouldn't be pulling at my ear so much." Many of these personal things often are not seen by observers. However, the tape should reveal teaching behaviors to you that an observer will note, and you will be able to consider changing things that may have a negative impact on the class. After viewing the tape alone, ask an experienced observer to watch it with you. A helpful observer will ask questions to clarify what you did and may call attention to specific details, but not offer suggestions until the end of the tape. In the section on videotaping in *Tools for Teaching*, Barbara Davis (2009, Chapter 53) provides some good suggestions to guide the review of a videotaped session.

Student opinion. If you want to know how things are going in large classes, but do not have time to review a couple hundred responses every week, consider asking a random sample of students for comments. You should be able to get a dozen students to give thoughtful, honest

comments about the course on a weekly basis. You only need to be concerned about anonymity if there appear to be sensitive issues in the class, for example, tension in the class because of a cheating incident. In most cases, students will be open about issues concerning clarity of presentations, effectiveness of methods, and fairness of assessment. You or an assistant can interview a sample of students asking them to speak for the class, as well as for themselves, which allows students to take on more of a group identity. Another approach is to form a class advisory panel as a means of obtaining regular student feedback (Brookfield, 1990).

On-going reflection. A strategy that many faculty members find helpful in evaluating their teaching is to set aside quiet time shortly after they teach a class session during which they reflect upon what went well and what they would do differently the next time they teach the course. This provides an opportunity for a faculty member who has used one of the CATs or other strategies mentioned to review and incorporate feedback from students or peers into actions items. One of Mary's colleagues keeps a journal in which she enters the results of such reflections following each class session. The journal entries guide teaching decisions during the current term and when the course is taught again. It serves as documentation of adjustments made in teaching in response to student and peer feedback for annual reviews or teaching portfolios. It also assists with end of term reflection which is discussed later in this unit.

Activity:

What information about your teaching would you find useful while your course is in progress? How would you get that information? Develop a plan for formative evaluation of your teaching. Where possible, indicate when you will get that information during the course.

End-of-Semester Evaluation

The most familiar form of evaluation of teaching is the end of semester, student completed rating forms. Much research has been conducted on this process and it continues to provoke much controversy. However, there are other ways to get information about your course at the end of the semester that is more useful for revising a course and for improving your teaching techniques. If you consider evaluation as a system, not as data from a single end of semester source, you can combine data gathered from multiple methods during the course with the end of course evaluation to gain a richer understanding of the relationships among these methods and data.

Student ratings. The numbers we get from student ratings at the end of a semester are not very useful for developing our teaching and improving our courses; what do you do in response to a rating of 3.8? However, these ratings are used at many colleges and universities for administrative decisions about salary and promotion.

The research on student ratings shows that student evaluations of teaching are reliable and valid when administered properly (Cashin, 1995; Davis, 2009, p. 534-537). The ratings are also controversial (McKeachie, 1997). Those who question the validity of student ratings of teaching primarily are concerned with biasing factors. However, most of this bias can be prevented by proper administration of the rating forms.

Proper administration means that you use a well-designed form under controlled conditions. Many schools and departments design their own forms, which may or may not be designed to adequately collect meaningful data. Many institutions purchase forms such as those available from the Kansas State University [IDEA system](#) that includes forms for a variety of

courses combined with an administration and interpretation system that allows comparison of the results from individual courses with a national database of similar courses. That is an excellent system, but it is relatively expensive. Davis (2009, p. 537-540) provides guidelines for designing or selecting a questionnaire. A locally developed form that has been checked by an expert in measurement will work well for most purposes. The form that Jason uses appears in Appendix 8B. Another form to consider is the [Teachers Behavior Checklist](#), which is based on a study of the behaviors of award-winning teachers (Keeley, et al., 2006). Controlled administration is not a simple matter of handing these forms out at a time that is convenient for the teacher. Cashin (1989) provides 34 recommendations for managing student ratings of teaching. Some of these recommendations are common sense: do not administer the form on the day of the final exam. Some recommendations concern requirements for statistical adequacy: get data from at least ten raters and from at least two-thirds of the class. Other important recommendations are that the instructor should leave the room while students complete the form and that the forms be collected by a neutral party.

Unfortunately, many of the recommendations are not followed by individual instructors or by their departments, and then the results are used to compare courses and teachers and to make important decisions. That is an ethical issue and it is the instructor's responsibility to be as careful as possible in designing and implementing an evaluation system. The instructor's competence in evaluation can then itself become an aspect of teaching that is reported.

Quantitative student ratings are often used to compare instructors across courses and in individual instructors' courses from semester to semester. Because numbers do not provide specific suggestions for improvement, you will want to provide students with an opportunity to respond to open-ended questions. This can be done on a separate form in which you ask about a

variety of aspects of the course, or at the end of the quantitative form, or after each item on that form. We do not favor the second alternative (including open-ended questions at the end of the quantitative form) because students tend to feel that the rating task is finished and take a casual approach to the narrative items at the end. The other two suggestions work better. Providing space for a comment after each quantitative item allows students to give examples that can help teachers understand the rating and make improvements.

One of the problems in administering student evaluations is motivating students to take them seriously. One solution to this problem that Jim uses is to create a situation where doing the evaluation is the students' primary task and for which there is group support. Jim sets aside one class period of at least fifty minutes that he indicates on the syllabus is for "course summary and evaluation." On that day in most of his classes he follows this schedule:

- Review the major objectives of the course and how we tried to achieve them, giving examples from the course content.
- Ask students to indicate why these objectives and this course are important for their education. The intent is to get students to take a broad view of the course, rather than focus on the most recent topic.
- Next, give an overview of the evaluation process for this class period, which begins by handing out a form with the items for which students are to write narrative responses. Typically, Jim asks them to write strengths and needed improvements in specific course areas like discussions, exams, and the textbook.
- Once students are finished with the previous step, Jim facilitates a class discussion about their narrative responses. Often students' comments may stimulate other students to agree or disagree, and to consider things they hadn't thought of previously.

- Students then complete the open-ended items, adding ideas from the discussion.
- Jim then leaves the room as a student distributes the quantitative rating form to the students and collects it upon completion. This student will later take the forms to the department office where the completed forms are held until final grades are submitted. This maximizes anonymity and seeks to protect students who might be concerned about an effect on their final grade.
- It is important to take one more step. Students are told that the ratings are not the end of class for that day. This is done to prevent them from rushing through the form so they can leave the class early. After allowing enough time for all students to complete their ratings carefully, which usually only takes about 5-10 minutes, Jim returns and thanks the students for being there and makes whatever personal comments fit the situation. This may include recognizing some unique event (e.g., the year of 9-11), an activity that worked particularly well, or an opportunity to be inspirational.

When there are less than ten students, Jim does not use the quantitative form, but invites a student assistant or colleague to interview the students as a group. The interviewer uses open-ended questions as a guide and takes notes on student responses. The interviewer then types up the notes, which can be filed and submitted for evaluation by others.

Activity

Design an end-of-semester evaluation of your course and your teaching that uses multiple methods. Outline how you will administer this evaluation.

Reflection

Imagine that you have completed your course, submitted your grades, and now can look at the evaluations that you collected. Although we approach this task with some trepidation, there is the urge to jump right to the over-all rating on the quantitative form to get our “grade.” Resist this temptation.

Before you look at your data, find time to sit quietly and think about your course. What aspects are you pleased about and why? What things will you change the next time you teach this course? Are there critical incidents you wish you could repeat and others you will try to prevent happening again? Write your thoughts down without editing them, and then look at your data.

Jim looks at the quantitative data first, yielding to the temptation to see his final scores. He then reads through all the written comments to get a general sense of what issues the students identified as positive or needing improvement. [I (Jim) note here that in almost 40 years of teaching there always was something that needed to be improved.] He then puts the comments in categories and totals the number in each category.

After completing the previous steps, Jim returns to his self-evaluation and adds the students’ perspective. (See Appendix 8C for one of Jim’s self evaluations.) We all place a good deal of credibility in the judgments of students as a group. While a few individuals may be picky or vindictive, most give honest helpful comments and positive reinforcement. While, unfortunately it is often the one critical comment that keeps our attention, it is important to focus on the whole picture that emerges.

The final step is critical in terms of the model we are using in this guide. Take the narrative evaluation you have written that includes your evaluation of the semester and your students’ feedback and compare it to your teaching philosophy. Does your evaluation show that

you were true to that philosophy? Where are the discrepancies? If you see discrepancies, then consider what you should change. Either you will change your teaching methods or revise your teaching philosophy or both. And the cycle continues.

Looking Ahead

Most of our previous Units in this guide have focused on the mechanics of teaching (designing a course and choosing methods) and data collection (assessment of students and evaluation of teaching). Unit 9 looks at how we include values and maintain ethical standards in our teaching.

References

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Appendix 8A

Observation Categories for the Evaluation of Teaching

[This is a brief version of a long form that is part of an observation system developed by James Korn.]

Most of these categories use a 5-point scale, and allow for additional written comments and examples. It is possible to observe all items in these categories in any one class, but it may be more helpful to focus on a smaller number.

Speech

- Speed (slow-fast)
- Loudness (soft-loud)
- Expressiveness
- Clarity
- Reads from notes (little- a lot)

Non-verbal Behavior

- Movement (little-excessive)
- Gestures
- Eye contact
- Distracting mannerisms (no/yes)
- Energy/Enthusiasm (little-much)
- Nervous-Relaxed

Explanation

- Use of examples (few-too many)
- Defines terms clearly
- Rephrases difficult ideas
- Effective use of visual aids and demonstrations

Organization

- Teacher is organized well (disagree-agree)
- Provides overview and class, and structure (no/yes)
- Smooth, clear transitions
- Summarizes periodically
- Reviews major points at end of class

Interest

- Teacher shows interest in the topic
- Uses humor appropriately
- Shows practical applications
- Relates material to contemporary events
- Presents ideas and questions that stimulate discussion

Rapport

- Addresses students by name
- Talks with students before and after class
- Shows concern for students
- Respects students' ideas
- Appears friendly, easy to talk to

Participation

- How much student-student interaction is there?
- Encourages questions and comments from students
- Asks questions of individual students
- Divides class into groups that are managed well
- Praises students for good ideas
- Corrects students
- Manages class well (extraneous talking, other disruptions)

Appendix 8B

Sample Instructor Evaluation Form from Jason Sikorski

Were you provided with a course outline or syllabus at the beginning of this course?

Yes No

Was an explanation of course attendance policies given at the beginning of the term?

Yes No Uncertain

Were the title and catalog description of this course consistent with the course content?

Yes No Uncertain

Was a written explanation of grading policies distributed at the beginning of the course?

Yes No

Did your class begin and end at the schedule time?

Always Generally Rarely

Were any classes in this course ever cancelled?

Never Only rarely and with an Explanation Often

The time in this class was worthwhile.

1	2	3	4	5	Don't
Strongly				Strongly	know
Disagree				agree	

[This 5-point scale is used on all remaining items.]

The methods of instruction have helped me understand the material.

Major points in this class were made clear.

The instructor has been available to me for individual consultation.

It was possible for me to make comments, ask questions, or express ideas in class

Class meetings have been intellectually stimulating.

Reading the assigned material has helped me understand this subject.

Exams and out of class assignments have helped me understand this subject.

My work for this class has been graded fairly.

The number of exams and other graded assignments has been sufficient to evaluate my progress.

My experiences in this class make me want to learn more about this subject.

I would rate the quality of instruction in this course as high.

I would rate the overall quality of this course as high.

Appendix 8C

Narrative Self Evaluation PSYA 101 General Psychology Spring 2000

I received among the best quantitative student ratings that I have ever had, but this is not my long sought-after “great course.” The students’ comments and my own experience tell me that I can do better. I don’t like the so-called Spring semester; the weather is often gloomy and students too often seem tired of school, so in that context I was quite pleased with the over-all strong positive evaluations that I received.

What I did well: getting to know my students (N = 22), planning class activities, and developing study guides for tests. I provided opportunities for students to meet with me individually, but less than 50% did so. I tried to help students who were doing poorly, but had two failures. Most of the learning activities worked well, but I probably should reduce the number and do a better job of evaluating them.

What I want to improve: active learning and critical thinking activities in class. I still am oppressed by the habit of wanting to cover material. Students did learn the five views of human nature, but I’m not sure they could apply these views. Most students liked the class and small group discussions, but I can do better in managing them.

I see two possibilities for the next version of this course: (1) just tinker with details, maintain enthusiasm and closeness, and I will do just as well, or (2) take some risks and try new things to promote active learning, critical thinking, and closeness learning.