

Resource Guide

Creating a Plan for Alternative Assessment of Teaching

Forming a truly comprehensive view of an instructor's effectiveness in teaching relies on much more than just scores on end-of-term student ratings of teaching surveys. Especially in situations of important decisions about contract renewal, tenure, and promotion, a holistic picture of an instructor's teaching can be an important tool in evidence-based decision making. Below are brief descriptions of three primary steps involved in building an alternative system for assessing teaching.

- **Setting Goals and Definitions**

Before any plan for assessment of teaching can be implemented, it is essential to outline what the purposes are for that system. From that central purpose, many other decisions will be made about how the system will be implemented, by whom, and in what circumstances; thus, careful attention to setting up the foundational purpose(s) is a key component of the process. For instance, is the goal of the system to be a formative process that supports ongoing teaching development throughout an instructor's career (Blumberg), or is the primary goal to have a transparent process by which tenure and promotion decisions may be more easily made (Arreola)? Perhaps, still, the goal is some unique combination of both, or some entirely other goal.

As part of determining the primary goal(s) of an assessment plan, it is important to clarify the definitions of terms and ideas that will be part of the implementation of the program. Terms such as *formative and summative, assessment and evaluation, objectivity and subjectivity* that work in a binary relationship with each other as well as terms such as *effective teaching, measurement, comprehensive, peer*, and others that rely on the context of a specific system, and agreement among all within that context, will beg for definition (Arreola, Blumberg, Chism).

- **Establishing a System for Peer Review of Teaching**

Peer review of teaching is a hallmark of many comprehensive systems of assessing teaching. Though it varies from system to system, this often includes looking at an individual's teaching through a variety of sources such as classroom observations, syllabus and assignment review, and self-reflection, in order to rate expertise in the areas of: "content, instructional design, instructional delivery, teaching development and scholarship, and involvement in teaching" (Chism). Each of these areas can also be broken down into its component parts. For instance, according to Chism, content expertise may consist of the following parts: "factual accuracy, breadth of knowledge, depth of knowledge and currency". Relying on peers to give feedback in these areas not only increases the dimensions of an assessment of teaching, but also a peer review

system like this creates the opportunity to add value to teaching as a scholarly activity. Chism notes, "Because peer review is a way of making teaching public, it is also seen as enhancing the value of teaching and engaging peers in scholarly examination of their profession (13).

- **Building and Reviewing a Teaching Portfolio**

According to Chism, "a good [teaching] portfolio is woven together by narrative commentary from the faculty member that describes the context for the documentation and presents reflections on the teaching itself. It presents multiple sources of evidence, chronicles the development of the instructor and the learning of the students, and projects a future vision" (168). Such a portfolio can serve multiple assessment purposes depending on what a program has chosen as the goal(s) of its system. Portfolios can be compiled to show an entire teaching career, a single course, and anything in between. For individual instructors, the teaching portfolio also represents an opportunity to shape the narrative of one's teaching story, giving some control to the ways in which the various artifacts of teaching—course syllabi, assignments, lectures, etc.—are connected to the instructor's teaching philosophy and development over time.

Resources

Arreola, Raul. A. *Developing a Comprehensive Faculty Evaluation System: A Guide to Designing, Building, and Operating Large-Scale Faculty Evaluation Systems*, 3rd Ed. Anker, 2007.

Blumberg, Phyllis. *Assessing and Improving Your Teaching: Strategies and Rubrics for Faculty Growth and Student Learning*. Jossey-Bass, 2014.

Chism, Nancy Van Note. *Peer Review of Teaching: A Sourcebook*, 2nd Ed. Anker, 2007.

For more information or to discuss how you might incorporate these ideas into your college, department, or program, contact the Reinert Center at ctl@slu.edu.