FACET Excellence in Teaching Recommendations
Approved by FACET Steering Committee May 15, 2015

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The FACET Excellence in Teaching Task Force 2014-2015 has prepared the following report on best practices in evaluating excellence in teaching. This report should not be read as an exhaustive or hierarchical checklist of standards to be used to evaluate evidence of teaching excellence, nor should any one of these practices be considered requisite. Just as evidence for outstanding research varies across Indiana University campuses and across academic disciplines (e.g. publishing books versus journal articles, securing grants, exhibiting work, etc.), so, too, evidence used to demonstrate excellence in teaching will vary across IU campuses and academic disciplines. As noted in the IU-Bloomington tenure and promotion guidelines, "Judgments about teaching effectiveness cannot be reduced to a single indicator or measure." This is not to say that excellence in teaching is an elusive concept that cannot be demonstrated. Rather, it is to make clear a number of ways in which such evidence can be documented and evaluated. The intent of this report is to provide clarity with flexibility in determining what constitutes evidence of excellence in teaching. Ideally, instructors should be able to provide a triangulation of evidence demonstrating teaching excellence. The clear recommendation of this report is that more than one method of demonstrating and evaluating excellence in teaching should be used and that no one method is sacrosanct.

BEST PRACTICES IN EVALUATING EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING

Teaching is a complex activity. No single measure can be used as evidence of effective teaching. Berk (2014) provides an overview of 15 sources of evidence used to evaluate teaching effectiveness (student rating, peer observations of classes, peer review of course materials, external expert ratings, self-ratings, videos, student interviews, exit and alumni ratings, employer ratings, mentor's advice, administrator ratings, teaching scholarship, teaching awards, learning outcome measures, and teaching course portfolio). This review makes it very clear that each source of evidence has shortcomings; however, each source also provides unique information. Best practices in documenting teaching excellence recommend using multiple sources of evidence that can be provided by the instructor, students, or external measures such as peer review.

Central characteristics of excellence in teaching include the ability of the instructor to engage students and facilitate student learning. This requires expert knowledge of the subject and awareness of the areas that make it difficult for students to master the material. These central characteristics can be documented in multiple ways, and specific examples are provided below.

The teaching statement written by the faculty member can provide reflection on practice as evidence of teaching excellence. In addition to reflection on an instructor's teaching philosophy and practices, this statement can also detail efforts to improve teaching, such as describing how a course has been refined to improve student learning or mastery of skills, as well as evidence of professional development to improve instruction.

How does the course design fit learning objectives? The syllabus, sample course materials, and a narrative from the Instructor can provide evidence of connections between learning objectives, activities used to engage students, and assessments that provide feedback on student mastery of skills or material. Based on expertise in the discipline, each instructor must prioritize knowledge and choose skills on which to focus. For the content and skills that are covered, how does the course design allow students to practice learning/working with material over the course of the semester? How are expectations for assignments and course policies communicated? The narrative should help reviewers see the connections between learning objectives, activities used to engage students, and assessments that provide feedback on student skills and mastery of material.

How well do students meet course objectives? This can be demonstrated with examples of the proportion of a class showing change over the course of the semester or other assessment of student learning that can document how well students meet course objectives. Documenting mentoring, advising, and providing opportunities for students to work with material beyond the classroom can provide additional evidence of teaching excellence in helping students achieve course objectives.

What do the students think of the course and its instruction? This embodies how students think the instruction has helped them meet the course objectives and how well they think the instructor engages students. What are the most difficult aspects of the course and how does the instructor help students reach these goals? This can be also be assessed through student evaluations, as well as through course design and instructor reflection on teaching practices.

More broadly, how does the instructor guide student thinking and behavior? Mastery of content is not the only measure. Faculty can demonstrate that course design and instructional methods help students write and speak clearly and effectively, think critically, define and solve problems, engage in decision-making, and find relevant and reliable information. Such skills allow students to become independent learners and, after graduation, to understand the dynamics of complex issues and engage in effective problem solving as active members of their professions and their communities.

External measures of teaching effectiveness can also provide unique information about the instructor's effectiveness in the classroom. Peer review of class instruction or of course materials can provide perspective on engagement of students in the classroom, assess course design or teaching approach in the context of course level or topic, or provide perspective on how the instruction or course design compares with similar courses (Chism 2006; see FACET Peer Review web resources). Presentation at a conference sharing ideas for development of course content or pedagogy, curriculum grants, publication on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, a textbook publication, or a published entry in an encyclopedia or handbook related to course content would also offer external evidence of teaching excellence. Teaching awards or recognition from other sources noting the Instructor's ability to engage students and create experiences that foster student mastery of material and skills are still other sources of external evidence of teaching excellence. Feedback from alumni or employers on student learning or the course can also provide external evidence of teaching excellence as well, though this type of external feedback is usually rare.

Excellent teachers may differ in how they excel. For example, one teacher may focus on writing skills, another may focus on developing arguments, another may focus on civic engagement and awareness of self and others, another may focus on helping students master a craft of technique to her or his highest ability, and another may focus on helping students master key concepts so they can build more in-depth knowledge in upper level courses or design studies that contribute to the body of knowledge. One danger in narrowing how teaching excellence is defined is that students have the greatest potential to grow and have the richest academic experience when they are exposed to faculty who excel in different ways.

How we teach is determined by the goals of the course, level of the course, course enrollment, and how the course fits within the total curriculum. How we teach is also determined by the background students bring to the course; student needs and abilities differ within a single classroom, across units, and across our campuses, which have varying admission policies. The faculty on each campus must have the primary role in defining expectations for excellence in teaching because the mission of each campus differs and the needs of the students differ by campus. Faculty understand the culture of each campus and respect differences by discipline in the skills and knowledge students need to master. There is no single checkbox that can universally measure teaching excellence across our disciplines and our campuses, but there are multiple sources of evidence that can demonstrate teaching excellence, as detailed in this document.

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Best Practices Resources:

FACET Peer Review Training modules: https://facet.indiana.edu/peer-review/peer-review-training.shtml
Carnegie Mellon University: http://www.cmu.edu/teaching/principles/teaching.html
Michigan State University: Faculty guide for reappointment, promotion and tenure review. http://www.hr.msu.edu/promotion/facacadstaff/FacGuideTenure.htm
North Carolina State University: Appointment, reappointment, promotion and tenure policies. http://policies.ncsu.edu/regulation/reg-05-20-27
Rutgers University: http://senate.rutgers.edu/s0109.html
University of Michigan: http://www.crlt.umich.edu/tstrategies/guidelines.php
UCLA Office of Instructional Development (n.d.). Office of Instructional Development: Assessment. Retrieved from: http://www.oid.ucla.edu/assessment