

EVALUATION OF TEACHING

BACKGROUND

University Regulations very clearly set forth what every faculty member already knows about teaching and the evaluation of teaching.

“Effective teaching should be a fundamental endeavor of all members of the faculty.”

University Regulation 60.5.14

“Informed judgments concerning a faculty member's accomplishments can be made only by qualified colleagues.”

University Regulation 60.5.15

Indeed, Rutgers is not unique in recognizing these principles. They are recognized and articulated at virtually every institution of higher education in the United States.

But Rutgers does not always adhere to these principles when it carries out the evaluation of teaching. Rutgers will accept an evaluation of a faculty member's teaching based solely on student evaluations that are done on line. There has been a substantial body of research carried out in recent years that convincingly demonstrates the unreliability and biases of the type of student evaluations done at Rutgers. Yet academic administrators from Deans to the President will make promotion, tenure, and reappointment decisions even when student evaluations are the only evaluations of teaching.

When most tenure-track faculty are being considered for reappointment, promotion, or tenure, they must complete a Recommendation Information Form. When completing this form, the faculty member must provide the following information (in tabular form):

“For each course for which summary student evaluation data are available, include the number of student evaluation responses received, and the instructor and departmental mean values for questions 9 and 10 on the University's Student Instructional Rating Form. If units use a different rating form, please indicate maximum rating value. If evaluations are not included for a specific course, please account for missing evaluations.”

These student evaluation data are the only evaluative information specifically sought in the Instructional Rating Forms. Departments may, if they wish (and often do), add additional evaluative data in the departmental narrative, which becomes part of the packet. But such additional data are not required. Faculty members may, if they wish, add data or respond to student evaluations in their personal statements, which also become part of their packets.

Of even greater concern is the evaluation of the teaching of faculty not on the tenure-track, who are providing the majority of classroom instruction at Rutgers. There is no packet associated with the consideration of most of these faculty members for reappointment. There is no verifiable requirement that reappointment decisions be based on any teaching evaluations other than the student evaluations. Critical, life-changing decisions can be made about these faculty members at Rutgers based solely on demonstrably unreliable measurements. Not surprisingly, some of these faculty members may choose to teach in a way that results in the most positive student evaluations, although not necessarily the best student learning.

Rutgers is alone among our peer and peer aspirant public universities of the CIC in the institutional requirements for the evaluation of teaching. The way in which the others carry out the evaluation of teaching is best summed up in this statement from the University of Michigan:

The most important consideration in teaching evaluation, both for improvement purposes and for personnel decisions, is the use of multiple methods of teaching evaluation involving multiple sources of data.

To ensure that the evaluation system adopted is credible and acceptable, faculty members must have a strong hand in its development

RESOLUTION

The New Brunswick Faculty Council calls upon the Rutgers administration to work together with the New Brunswick Faculty Council to create and charge a Task Force with developing a teaching evaluation program that will, as accurately as possible, assess quality of instruction. The Task Force should be broadly representative of the faculty and students. It should include tenure track faculty at various ranks, nontenure track faculty, part time lecturers, and teaching assistants, as well as students from the sciences and the nonsciences. . It should also include academic administrators, a representative of CTAAR, and an outside expert.

Rutgers must have a teaching evaluation program that will:

1. provide a rigorous and meaningful evaluation of the quality of faculty teaching for consideration in decisions about the renewal, promotion, and tenure of faculty.
2. provide feedback on the quality of faculty teaching that will help units maintain their overall commitment to pedagogy and help individual faculty members continue to develop their teaching skills.

In order to achieve these goals, the Task Force should address and remedy the defects of our current Student Evaluation system; should rely on faculty to develop methods of evaluation that may often be uniquely suited for their disciplines; and should be provided with such funding, staff support, and professional expertise as the Task Force may require to fulfill its charge.