




The University of Vermont

Office of the Provost
and Senior Vice President

TO: Academic Deans

FROM: David V. Rosowsky, Provost and Senior Vice President 

DATE: September 23, 2014

SUBJ: Evaluation of Teaching Performance

cc: Brian Reed, Associate Provost for Teaching and Learning

BACKGROUND

During the past year, a number of discussions have been held on the topic of evaluation of teaching. These conversations have been held by the Council of Deans, the Provost's Academic Leadership Council (PALC), the Faculty Senate Executive Council, the broader Faculty Senate, and no doubt many of the colleges and schools. The evaluation of teaching is essential not only for performance reviews (both annual performance reviews and reviews as part of the RPT process) but also to provide valuable and timely advice/guidance to faculty members as they develop and grow throughout their teaching career. Annual performance reviews and the RPT process are addressed in the *University Manual* and the College of Medicine *Faculty Handbook*, and by the Collective Bargaining Agreement.

The Council of Deans' Subcommittee on Teaching Evaluations, in their memo (dated 1/12/14) to me, recommended a series of specific core strategies and action steps related to creating "A Culture of Teaching Excellence" including a more comprehensive ("multi-source") approach to teaching assessment.

The Faculty Senate Executive Council has expressed concern about an over-reliance on student evaluations in assessing teaching performance, in particular for the case of lecturers for whom teaching is the only consideration in performance reviews. The Faculty Senate leadership suggests that having multiple modes (or sources) of assessment will provide a broader, more balanced perspective on the teaching performance of faculty at all ranks.

Thus, it seems clear that there is a shared desire at this time to address how we evaluate teaching – for all the right reasons. I want to capitalize on this opportunity to improve how we evaluate teaching, provide meaningful information to faculty members to enhance their teaching effectiveness, and re-affirm our commitment as a community of scholars and as a university to *teaching excellence*.

NEXT STEPS

Considering all of the shared goals, recommendations, and suggested paths forward, I decided the best first step was to work *jointly* with the Faculty Senate to conduct an “inventory” of current teaching assessment practices in the colleges/schools. Brian Reed, Associate Provost for Teaching and Learning, has worked closely with the colleagues in the Senate to create and administer a survey that has been sent to all Department Chairs and Academic Program Directors. Brian shared this plan and the survey with you on 9/18/14 by e-mail. Once Brian has compiled all responses, he will share the results of the survey with the Council of Deans and the Faculty Senate.

In the meantime, in the charge below I am asking that each dean having responsibility for instructional faculty undertake discussions at the appropriate levels to consider how best to meet the dual needs of (1) providing robust information on which to base performance reviews of teaching, and (2) providing timely and useful feedback to instructional faculty to enable them to be the best possible teachers they can be.

Evaluation of teaching is about faculty development and enabling success. As such, it should be empowering, not punitive. That said, and as specified in the *University Manual*, it is your responsibility as Dean to ensure adequate, accurate, and robust information is coming forward to inform performance review processes.

One of the questions in the joint Provost’s Office/Faculty Senate survey asks if what you are currently doing to assess teaching serves your needs. I ask that you and your faculty reflect carefully on this question and use this as a starting point in your discussions.

SPECIFIC CHARGE TO THE DEANS

RE: Models for the Evaluation of Teaching Performance

The academic deans are charged to develop a model for assessing teaching performance in their college/school that includes, but is not limited to, the results of student evaluations of courses. The deans, in consultation with their faculty and students, will determine additional means for evaluating and assessing teaching effectiveness as broadly defined above. This might include, for example, an assessment of how course activities are tied to learning objectives, some form of peer evaluation of teaching, and/or assessment of how well students achieved identified learning outcomes. The key here is that a college/school *cannot rely solely on student input*. The model must comprise a broad and credible methodology for obtaining the proper information to assess teaching performance. The deans are encouraged to engage their faculty in a consultative manner to gather input and feedback on any supplemental assessment mechanism(s). Any instrument developed for this purpose should be shared with faculty prior to implementation.

The Provost’s Office will review each unit’s proposed model on the basis of the guidelines noted above, and in consultation with the Faculty Senate. Once it has been approved by the Provost, deans will be responsible for implementing the model within their college/school. The process and procedures will be posted and communicated to all instructional faculty in the college/school prior to implementation.

DEADLINE: Please provide your recommended model for the evaluation of teaching performance in your college/school to Brian Reed by **December 1, 2014**.