

## College Faculty Affairs Committee End of Year Report (2020-2021)

### Committee members:

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### Meetings:

The committee conducted business through three Zoom meetings in the Fall, one Zoom meeting in the Spring, Teams sharing of documents, and emails.

### Charges:

- **Charge #1:** Investigate how faculty workload is defined across PSU campuses with a focus on the impact of online teaching.

*Progress with the charge:* Tabled until after more detailed guidance of Charge 2 is provided.

- **Charge #2:** Provide practical alternatives to SRTE teaching evaluations focusing on evaluating online teaching

*Progress with the charge:* Committee relied on input from meetings with members of the instructional design team and other experts contributed to guidance and suggestions.

The committee would like to recognize Jonathan Gunnel and Grace Chang from the Instructional Design team for their assistance and suggestions regarding this issue. In addition, the committee appreciates the helpful comments from the Annual Faculty Review committee of the Black School of Business. The COVID-related events emphasized the importance of finding alternative measures of faculty effectiveness in teaching. With the elimination of SRTEs during the recent semesters teaching effectiveness was judged on a more or less ad hoc basis. The Senate at University Park is also working towards alternative measures of teaching effectiveness. The purpose of this report is to summarize some helpful measures that are used as industry standards and provide a foundational structure that different schools can build upon or modify as needed.

The overwhelmingly best structure for creating effective online teaching is based on Quality Matters specific review standards of higher education. A modified version of the QM scoring is used by the Penn State Instructional Design team. Thus, it is critical that evaluation of online teaching is linked to quality measures identified in this rubric. Below the specific QM standards are listed for each section. When the instructional design team

evaluates online courses they use a modified scoring tool similar to the one presented below. The committee suggests that each school identifies important key standards that each faculty member can use to self-evaluate their online course. More specific details can be added later as this will be an ongoing process of creating an effective self-evaluation tool for teaching effectiveness. While creating an effective online platform is a key to the success of online teaching other measures should be added. For example, frequency of communication with students, number of videos linked to key objectives, and specific learning by doing tasks designed to teach and reinforce key learning outcomes.

### **Course Overview and Introduction**

- 1.1. Instructions make clear how to get started and where to find various course components.
- 1.2. Learners are introduced to the purpose and structure of the course.
- 1.3. Communication expectations for online discussions, email, and other forms of interaction are clearly stated.
- 1.4. Course and institutional policies with which the learner is expected to comply are clearly stated within the course, or a link to current policies is provided.
- 1.5. Minimum technology requirements for the course are clearly stated, and information on how to obtain the technologies is provided.
- 1.6. Computer skills and digital information literacy skills expected of the learner are clearly stated.
- 1.7. Expectations for prerequisite knowledge in the discipline and/or any required competencies are clearly stated.
- 1.8. The self-introduction by the instructor is professional and is available online.
- 1.9. 1.9 Learners are asked to introduce themselves to the class.

### **Learning Objectives (Competencies)**

- 2.1. The course learning objectives, or course/program competencies, describe outcomes that are measurable.
- 2.2. The module/unit-level learning objectives or competencies describe outcomes that are measurable and consistent with the course-level objectives or competencies
- 2.3. Learning objectives or competencies are stated clearly, are written from the learner's perspective, and are prominently located in the course.
- 2.4. The relationship between learning objectives or competencies and learning activities is clearly stated.
- 2.5. The learning objectives or competencies are suited to the level of the course.

### **Assessment and Measurement**

- 3.1. The assessments measure the achievement of the stated learning objectives or competencies.

- 3.2. The course grading policy is stated clearly at the beginning of the course.
- 3.3. Specific and descriptive criteria are provided for the evaluation of learners' work, and their connection to the course grading policy is clearly explained.
- 3.4. The assessments used are sequenced, varied, and suited to the level of the course.
- 3.5. The course provides learners with multiple opportunities to track their learning progress with timely feedback.

### **Instructional Materials**

- 4.1. The instructional materials contribute to the achievement of the stated learning objectives or competencies.
- 4.2. The relationship between the use of instructional materials in the course and completing learning activities is clearly explained.
- 4.3. The course models the academic integrity expected of learners by providing both source references and permissions for use of instructional materials.
- 4.4. The instructional materials represent up-to-date theory and practice in the discipline. 4.5 A variety of instructional materials is used in the course

### **Learning Activities and Learner Interaction**

- 5.1. The learning activities promote the achievement of the stated learning objectives or competencies.
- 5.2. Learning activities provide opportunities for interaction that support active learning.
- 5.3. The instructor's plan for interacting with learners during the course is clearly stated.
- 5.4. The requirements for learner interaction are clearly stated.

### **Course Technology**

- 6.1. The tools used in the course support the learning objectives or competencies.
- 6.2. Course tools promote learner engagement and active learning.
- 6.3. A variety of technology is used in the course.
- 6.4. The course provides learners with information on protecting their data and privacy.

### **Learner Support**

- 7.1. The course instructions articulate or link to a clear description of the technical support offered and how to obtain it.
- 7.2. Course instructions articulate or link to the institution's accessibility policies and services.
- 7.3. Course instructions articulate or link to the institution's academic support services and resources that can help learners succeed in the course.
- 7.4. Course instructions articulate or link to the institution's student services and resources that can help learners succeed.

### **Accessibility\* and Usability**

- 8.1. Course navigation facilitates ease of use.
- 8.2. The course design facilitates readability.
- 8.3. The course provides accessible text and images in files, documents, LMS pages, and web pages to meet the needs of diverse learners.
- 8.4. The course provides alternative means of access to multimedia content in formats that meet the needs of diverse learners.
- 8.5. Course multimedia facilitate ease of use. 8.6 Vendor accessibility statements are provided for all technologies required in the course

**Suggested self-evaluation scoring**

<b>QM Standards</b>	<b>Points</b>
1.1	3
1.2	3
1.3	2
1.4	2
1.5	2
1.6	1
1.7	1
1.8	1
1.9	1
2.1	3
2.2	3
2.3	3
2.4	3
2.5	3
3.1	3
3.2	3
3.3	3
3.4	2
3.5	2
4.1	3
4.2	3
4.3	2
4.4	2
4.5	2
5.1	3
5.2	3
5.3	3
5.4	2
5.5	3

QM Standards	Points
6.1	3
6.2	1
6.3	1
6.4	1
7.1	3
7.2	3
7.3	3
7.4	1
8.1	3
8.2	3
8.3	2
8.4	2
8.5	2
8.6	2
	100

### **Alternative Options to Evaluate Teaching to Complement SRTEs**

Reference: AAUP's "Changing Practices in Faculty Evaluation," by J. Elizabeth Miller and Peter Seldin

[Changing Practices in Faculty Evaluation | AAUP](#)

As discussed at the source document, student evaluation of teaching is widespread and is sometimes highly regarded for its quality. However, it has also been linked to grade inflation and other negative effects.

Evaluation of faculty members' teaching effectiveness is widely used in higher education. The following is a list of the most frequently used practices found at colleges and universities, ranked in order of frequency of use:

- Systematic student ratings
- Chair evaluation
- Self-evaluation
- Dean evaluation
- Classroom visits
- Committee evaluation
- Course syllabi and exams
- Colleagues' opinions
- Scholarly research/publication
- Grade distribution
- Alumni opinions
- Informal student opinions
- Long-term follow-up of students
- Student exam performance

- Enrollment in elective courses

Discussion: The purpose of this committee charge is to investigate alternatives to the SRTE process. As SRTE's are Penn State's "systematic student ratings," they are removed from consideration. Of the remaining, the following are discussed as to their relative merit to supplement the SRTE process at Behrend:

- Chair Evaluation: The department chair, guided by an evaluation rubric, would evaluate teaching performance. Such a system is already in place at Behrend, but the extent of its use is unknown.
- Self-evaluation: Penn State attempted such a process at the end of calendar year 2020 by introducing a "reflection" component to the AFARS process. However, this reflection was only announced very late in the year (November or later), and the guidance for it so wide, that its actual usefulness is unclear.
- Dean evaluation: Behrend could introduce such a process but the size of the institution is such that the "Dean" (chancellor?) would likely be unable to evaluate all but a near-meaningless fraction of the teaching faculty. Organizationally, "school directors" fill this role at Behrend; their ability to evaluate a significant portion of the faculty is greater, but not necessarily significantly so.
- Classroom visits: As discussed at the source document, it is a widespread opinion that "Classroom visitation is the only way to really know what's going on behind the closed classroom door." However, such visits are a component of one of the other methods of teaching evaluation, not a method in themselves.
- Committee evaluation: Behrend uses a system similar to this (the "Peer Evaluation") but it is labor intensive and requires weeks of coordination and planning. It is also focused on course delivery in general, not just in-person or virtual interactive ability. As discussed in the reference article, at some Universities research productivity influences the committee's teaching evaluation.
- Course syllabi and Exams: This is not a teaching evaluation method in its own right but, like "classroom visits" is a component of other evaluations.
- Colleagues' opinion: this seems to be a subjective form of the committee evaluation, of questionable accuracy.
- Scholarly research/publication: This seems to be a means of evaluating X to measure performance in Y. If teaching and research are separate aspects of a faculty member's performance, this is not a valid metric.
- Grade distribution: This is a possible method, but runs the risk of faculty members "engineering" grading methodologies to achieve a desired distribution.
- Alumni opinions: Similar to SRTE's, but with the added benefit of a longer view and maturation on the part of the student evaluator. Its applicability is limited to those with fairly long tenure at the institution.
- Informal student opinions: this seems to be a subjective version of the SRTE process, although the SRTE process itself is of such inconsistent participation, that it too is arguably subjective.
- Long-term follow-up of students: This seems to be a version of the alumni opinion, but expanded to include still-current students.

- Student exam performance: like “grade distribution,” but limited to certain exams. This method seems to have the same limitations as the former.
- Enrollment in elective courses: Apparently a version of “students vote with their feet,” this method assumes the existence of elective follow-on courses.

Analysis: It is important to remember that all faculty teaching evaluation processes are imperfect. Arguably, reliance upon a single method whose data are sourced from the recipients of the instruction (i.e. students) introduces conflict-of-interest concerns into the evaluation process. Hence, any means of introducing additional information that is not tarnished by this shortcoming enhances the process; the fact that any one of them is not “perfect” is not in itself an argument against its use when the imperfect method is seen as only one of several that together with student-sourced data assembles a more complete picture of the faculty member’s teaching effectiveness in a mosaic-like manner. Scrutiny of the fourteen methods listed above provides some insight as to their relative suitability for implementation at Behrend as a means to complement the SRTE process. They are presented here in roughly ordered by ease of employment.

1. Committee evaluation: A streamlined committee evaluation process consisting of two peer reviewers who would attend class and review the classroom teaching environment only, followed by an outbrief and a short 2-3 paragraph report could be employed. This review could be focused on any *one* of the following three areas of faculty-student interaction:

- Classroom Presentation: The peer reviewers would conduct a classroom visit and comment on the effectiveness of the faculty member to present material while engaging the student audience.
- Assessment Effectiveness: The peer reviewers would review quizzes, homework assignments, and exam materials to judge the effectiveness of the faculty member’s scored work at advancing attainment of the course’s outcomes.
- Materials Effectiveness: The peer reviewers would review the syllabus, lecture slides (if used), course handouts, example problems, etc. to determine their effectiveness at advancing attainment of the course’s outcomes.

The current “peer review” process is a comprehensive review, often spanning several weeks. As a result of this administrative burden, it is employed relatively rarely; faculty members may be evaluated only once or twice prior to a scheduled promotion, with some non-tenure-track faculty not evaluated at all. The method foreseen here is highly abbreviated, with a total time investment by the peer reviewers of not exceeding two hours. All three of these are completely adaptable to online coursework.

2. Department chair evaluation: Similar to the committee evaluation, but conducted by the department head. The human tendency to expand the review to a comprehensive evaluation of the faculty member’s teaching effectiveness in its entirety should be avoided. To this end, one of the three “focuses” of the committee evaluation could be conducted here, except by the department chair.

3. Self-evaluation: Penn State piloted this as a component of the annual faculty review for reports submitted in January of 2021. The effectiveness of these “self-reflections” is yet to be determined. With more detailed, focused and open-ended questions, announced at the beginning of the semester, a self-reflection could serve both as an effective evaluation method and improvement technique for teaching effectiveness. Example questions could be “describe the methods you use to engage non-participating students in classroom discussion,” or “discuss how you use graded coursework to identify the extent of student achievement of the course outcomes, and how the threshold for successfully completing the course is linked to attainment of the course outcomes.” The questions could be developed in advance by a school committee, and then disseminated at the beginning of the year as an “area of emphasis.” For example, a school focused on improving retention could use a question like “what techniques are you using in the classroom to facilitate and encourage student persistence in the program of study.”

4. Alumni/Ex-student evaluation: Asking SRTE-like questions, but of students one or more semesters after the completion of the course could provide valuable insight over that provided by those who have just finished the course. For example, a student in a challenging foundational course may initially resent the rigor of the course and its instructor, yet soften or even change perspective completely after having the benefit of follow-on courses. In some respects, this student feedback may actually be more valuable and insightful than the SRTE. Its applicability to senior-year courses will be difficult.

Conclusion: Multiple methods exist through which faculty members’ teaching may be evaluated to provide meaningful feedback, but through avenues other than the SRTE. Focused peer or department head review of classroom interaction, course materials, or course assignments can provide one source of this data. Self-evaluations with areas of emphasis designated by appropriate school leadership provide another such method. Lastly, student evaluations, but from a semester other than the one in which the course was taken provide another form of feedback. All of these methods will work equally well with in-person or online course formats.

- **Charge #3:** Create, conduct, and report survey results related to faculty and staff issues and concerns resulting from recent COVID environment.

***Progress with the charge:*** Charge was initiated at the November 10, 2020 meeting. Survey was conducted in the Fall of 2020. Survey results to first question are summarized below. Please see addendum for full survey results.

The standing charge or main purpose of the Faculty Affairs Committee is to advise the Council and administration on matters of policy concerning faculty affairs, on matters regarding the cultural, social, and material welfare of the faculty, and on matters affecting the educational environment in which the faculty work. Given the recent extreme changes resulting from recent COVID related events the committee felt in order to best serve faculty we needed to better understand the issues of greatest concerns at this point in



time. The committee created and conducted a survey in the Fall of 2021. The summary results to the first question of the survey for each school are reported below and ranked from most important issue to least. Please refer to the addendum for the full results of all survey questions. This survey data should be useful in determining future FA charges for next year, as well as better understanding the current concerns of faculty at Behrend.

## School of Business (n = 19)

questions	averages	stdev	importance ranking
Distribution of workload	<b>3.79</b>	1.38	1
Accommodation for work-life balance	<b>3.74</b>	1.70	2
Communication with administration	<b>3.68</b>	1.40	3
Availability of teaching technology	<b>3.37</b>	1.64	4
Effectiveness of shared governance	<b>3.21</b>	1.67	5
Equity of pay	<b>3.16</b>	1.42	6
Contract renewal	<b>3.11</b>	1.27	7
Accommodation for research needs	<b>3.11</b>	1.53	8
Gender discrimination	<b>2.37</b>	1.56	9
Race and/or Ethnic discrimination	<b>2.32</b>	1.59	10

## School of Science (n = 36)

questions	averages	stdev	importance ranking
Accommodation for work-life balance	<b>4.03</b>	1.13	1
Equity of pay	<b>4.00</b>	1.22	2
Communication with administration	<b>3.83</b>	1.06	3
Distribution of workload	<b>3.81</b>	1.41	4
Contract renewal	<b>3.56</b>	1.61	5
Accommodation for research needs	<b>3.50</b>	1.42	6
Availability of teaching technology	<b>3.39</b>	1.36	7
Effectiveness of shared governance	<b>3.36</b>	1.15	8
Race and/or Ethnic discrimination	<b>3.25</b>	1.50	9
Gender discrimination	<b>3.11</b>	1.53	10

## School of Humanities & Social Sciences (n = 35)

questions	averages	stdev	importance ranking
Equity of pay	<b>4.31</b>	1.23	1
Contract renewal	<b>4.11</b>	1.30	2
Distribution of workload	<b>4.09</b>	1.29	3
Gender discrimination	<b>3.89</b>	1.49	4
Communication with administration	<b>3.83</b>	1.34	5
Effectiveness of shared governance	<b>3.77</b>	1.35	6
Race and/or Ethnic discrimination	<b>3.74</b>	1.52	7
Accommodation for work-life balance	<b>3.74</b>	1.48	8
Accommodation for research needs	<b>3.63</b>	1.48	9
Availability of teaching technology	<b>2.80</b>	1.43	10

## School of Engineering (n = 29)

<b>questions</b>	<b>average</b>	<b>stdev</b>	<b>importance ranking</b>
<b>Equity of pay</b>	<b>3.97</b>	1.38	1
<b>Distribution of workload</b>	<b>3.79</b>	1.18	2
<b>Accommodation for work-life balance</b>	<b>3.79</b>	1.32	3
<b>Communication with administration</b>	<b>3.45</b>	1.35	4
<b>Availability of teaching technology</b>	<b>3.28</b>	1.39	5
<b>Race and/or Ethnic discrimination</b>	<b>3.14</b>	1.48	6
<b>Accommodation for research needs</b>	<b>3.03</b>	1.45	7
<b>Contract renewal</b>	<b>2.86</b>	1.73	8
<b>Gender discrimination</b>	<b>2.76</b>	1.50	9
<b>Effectiveness of shared governance</b>	<b>2.76</b>	1.21	10

**Proposed new charge from Faculty Senate for next year:**

Addressing the salary disparity between genders and schools.

- **Concerns:** In order to address this issue, the committee would need access to data related to salaries for genders and schools. This data could then be compared to national averages for each discipline to determine where disparities exist.