

## **1. Current Evaluation Measures and Recommendations**

### **I. Overview of DU Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET)**

One of the central charges to this Committee is to identify and improve current “concrete processes” used by DU/AHSS to evaluate teaching. Currently, DU/AHSS digitally distributes a six-point Likert scale to students that asks them to record their evaluations of teachers. Our division also allows for students to provide qualitative data in addition to quantitative data. The process used by DU/AHSS is known in the field as “student evaluation of teaching,” or SET. SET in our Division captures information for at least the following seven fields:

<i>The course was intellectually stimulating and challenging.</i>
<i>Student responsibilities and requirements for the course were clear.</i>
<i>I learned a great deal in this course.</i>
<i>Overall, this is an excellent course.</i>
<i>The instructor skillfully shared his or her knowledge about the subject matter.</i>
<i>Instructor feedback on course assignments was valuable and timely.</i>
<i>Overall, this is an effective instructor.</i>

The Committee understands that the collection of this data is used in at least the following ways:

- 1) By departmental chairs for recommending merit-pay increases
- 2) By the Office of the Dean for approving merit-pay increases
- 3) By departmental tenure and promotion committees to make recommendations on promotion
- 4) By the Office of the Dean and upper administration for approving tenure and promotion decisions
- 5) By instructors for the purpose of improving their teaching and revising course content
- 6) By University administrators to fulfill reporting requirements for accreditation

All of the above individuals/offices extract their data from Activity Insight (AI). AI does not appear to provide any guidelines to faculty for interpreting the data that is recorded.

- 1) **We recommend that AHSS seek out guidance from scholars and psychometricians in order to create and make readily available guidelines for the interpretation of SET data**

### **II. General Problems with SET**

The voluminous scholarly literature related to SET and ‘teaching effectiveness’ yields competing—indeed contradictory—opinions on the validity of SET. Even those scholars who assert the benefits of SET indicate that there are numerous fundamental problems with using SET

as a valid measure of “teaching effectiveness” or “student learning.” Several common objections include:

- frequent misinterpretation and misuse of numerical results (Aleamoni 160; Onweigbuzie et.al. 115)
- questionable instrument validity (Spooren, Brockx & Mortelmans 629; Sproule 13)
- the complexity of academic activity not given to performance management (Holmwood et. al. 31; Ory and Ryan 31; Davis 273)
- strong and non-uniform biases related to gender and race of instructors (Boring et. al. 2; Reid 148)
- fundamental lack of agreed criteria of teaching effectiveness (Clayson 16; Kulik 10; Stark & Freishtat 4; Stehle 889)
- consistent biases against stringent grading in evaluations (Clayson 19; Germain & Scandura 64-65; Kulik 20)
- lack of consideration of student perspectives in SET design (Onweigbuzie et.al. 120, 146, 150-151)
- improper/invalid SET design (Onweigbuzie et.al. *passim*; Ory and Ryan *passim*)

- 1) **We recommend that AHSS communicate the questionable validity of SET clearly to all those involved in tenure and promotion decisions**
- 2) **We recommend that AHSS indicate clearly on all SET reports to administrators that quantitative data are biased against female and minority (non-Caucasian) instructors**

### III. Qualified Support for SET

Despite admitting that there exist problems with SET, several scholars maintain its qualified overall benefit. Positive appraisals of SET include the following findings based on experiment and/or meta-analysis:

- SET in combination with “personal consultations” or “unobtrusive interventions” conducted by experts can be used by the instructor for improvement and by administration for documentation of effectiveness (Aleamoni 159; Marsh 787-788)
- there exists a positive—though small and inconsistent—association between student learning and SET (Clayson 23)
- SET accurately reflects a teacher’s “subject oriented behaviour in class” (Greimel-Fuhrmann and Geyer 237)
- quantitative SET results correlate with qualitative and other measures of learning (Kulik 13-14, 23)
- SET provides an accurate depiction of faculty “likeability” (Delucchi & Pelowski [qtd. Clayson 2016] p. 31)

- 1) We recommend that faculty who so desire are provided with the expert consultations that even strident defenders of SET acknowledge as necessary to improve teaching performance**

#### **IV. Opposition to SET**

Scholars who are critical of SET find substantial failings in SET methodology. Their findings as a result of experiment and/or meta-analysis include:

- that metrics of teaching quality are proxy metrics and do not rate what they claim (Holmwood 28; Stark & Freishtat 3-4; Spooren, Brockx & Mortelmans *passim*)
- to the extent that SET may be valid, it is not broadly valid on an institutional, departmental, or even course level (Boring et.al. 10; Sproule *passim*)
- that SET cannot be adjusted to exclude persistent and significant biases related to race and gender (Boring et.al. 7-10; Laube et. al. 92-95; Onweigebuie et.al. 136, 150)
- that no study post-1990 “showed a positive significant relationship” between learning and SET (Clayson 26)
- that a correlation between learning and SET is valid only to the extent that “the student’s perception of learning is valid,” which is often not the case (Clayson 27; Stark & Freishtat 4)
- that grading leniency is a “prime influence” on SET (Kulik 20; Germain & Scandura *passim*; Laube 91)

- 1) We recommend that AHSS acknowledge that SET may contribute to ‘grade inflation’**
- 2) We recommend that AHSS adopt an approach to evaluation that measures agreed upon standards of professional conduct (see p. 13), rather than the current proxy metrics that possess questionable validity and bias**

#### **V. Race and Gender in SET**

Many scholars emphasize the racial and gender biases inherent in SET. Conclusions from the relevant research literature include:

- that many students “exhibit bias against female and ethnic minority instructors” (Holmwood et. al. 28)
- that “instructors whom (students believe) are male receive significantly higher average SET” (Boring et.al. 2), and that “[o]verall, SET disadvantage female instructors” (Boring et.al. 11)
- that in the U.S., “SET of instructors of color appear to be biased downward” (Boring et.al. 10), and that “white males are actually being ‘graded up’” (Laube et.al. 92; see also Reid 148)
- that female students “place statistically significantly more weight on student-centeredness [...] than did males” (Onweigbuie et.al. 136), and that “Caucasian American students”

are “more likely to assess the instructor’s level of enthusiasm” than minority students (Onweigbuzie et.al. 150), which indicates that the race and gender of both faculty *and* student influence SET

- 1) **We recommend that AHSS cease relying on SET as a significant factor in tenure, promotion, and merit-award decisions due to systemic biases against women and minority faculty**
- 2) **We recommend that AHSS acknowledge that SET may contribute to the systemic professional disadvantage of women and minority faculty members**

## **VI. Suggestions for Use of SET**

Several scholarly articles reviewed present salient suggestions:

- using SET data with caution for instructional improvement (Boring et.al., 10)
- discontinuing the averaging and comparison of averages in SET as this is statistically meaningless (Stark & Freishtat 6)
- preventing the use of SET for personnel decisions (Boring et.al., 10; Sproule [2002] 292)
- reducing “the impact of gender” in SET by requiring administrative “training in the interpretation of evaluations” (Laube et.al. 96)
- removing global fields from SET “of the form ‘overall, s/he is an effective teacher” (Laube et.al. 96; Stark & Freishtat 6)
- including a “statement that acknowledges the potential impact of gender and race on the evaluation” (Laube et.al. 97)

- 1) **We recommend that AHSS instruct its departments and programs to use multiple assessment methods (e.g., portfolios, observations, evidence of ongoing pedagogical development through OTL) for faculty at critical career junctures**
- 2) **We recommend that AHSS maintain SET principally for the purpose of faculty members’ self-assessment, and that faculty receive guidance in interpreting SET data**
- 3) **We recommend that AHSS requires administrators to undergo professional training in order to evaluate SET data**
- 4) **We recommend that AHSS remove global items from SET (i.e., items 3, 4, 7)**
- 5) **We recommend that AHSS revise the current SET questionnaire based on the input of psychometricians and experts in the field to focus principally on student experience (e.g., ‘student enjoyment’; ‘stimulation of interest’; ‘effort expended’) and professional conduct**
- 6) **We recommend that AHSS replace the numerical Likert scale questions with descriptive phrases for rating items in order to forestall statistically meaningless averaging**

All sources are available online: <http://portfolio.du.edu/teachteach>

## **2. Office of Teaching and Learning**

### **I. The Role of the Office of Teaching of Learning**

The primary motivation for the Office of Teaching and Learning (OTL) at DU is to provide feedback, support and guidance to help faculty become effective, exemplary teachers. As such, the programs offered through OTL are not designed to evaluate individual faculty teaching, but rather to focus on professional development. OTL affords faculty opportunities to improve teaching through conversations about purposeful and effective philosophy and practice. Listed below are specific services (and brief descriptions) offered by OTL that could be helpful not only to improve teaching, but also to offer insight into evaluation through evidence obtained from peers, OTL consultants, and instructor self-assessment and reflection. Along with opportunities for individual faculty, OTL staff have recently begun meeting with interested department and program chairs to help with the development of fair teaching evaluations.

### **II. OTL Programs and Services for Teaching**

- *Teaching Consultations*

OTL staff offer teaching consultations with faculty that may include in-class observation, feedback, and discussion for improvement. After the consultation, faculty receive a letter documenting the professional development experience.

- *Technology Consultations*

Support staff is available to aid faculty in the use of technology in and out of the classroom. One-on-one consultations are available to help with Canvas, DU Portfolio, DU CourseMedia, and more.

- *Instructional design*

Consultants are able to collaborate with faculty regarding all aspects of instructional design, including (but not limited to) aspects such as course creation, instructional approaches, and best practices.

- *Workshops*

Several times a year, OTL offers workshops and/or conferences regarding particular teaching topics (e.g., Inclusive Excellence, Teaching and Learning Week, Teaching Online, Teaching at DU).

- *Student Feedback Sessions*

If a faculty member requests a mid-term student feedback session, an OTL consultant will attend a class facilitating both small and large group discussion with students to obtain information about the course. A meeting is then held between the OTL consultant and the faculty member discussing the feedback and tangible ways to incorporate formative feedback.

- *Peer classroom visit program*

This program is designed to provide an “a mutually supportive opportunity for self-reflection and sharing of good practice.” The main idea is for faculty to have a safe space to observe others’ teaching followed by a self-reflection on their own teaching practices. The program emphasizes that it is not a space for faculty to critique one another’s teaching.

- *Faculty Learning Communities*

FLCs allow a connection with other faculty and reflection on questions about teaching and learning. This cross-disciplinary group meets approximately once per month to discuss a particular teaching topic (e.g., Teaching International Students)

### **III. Recommendations:**

- 1. We recommend that AHSS increase awareness about programs offered through OTL for teaching effectiveness.**
- 2. We recommend that AHSS promote the utilization of such programs, particularly for struggling faculty.**
- 3. We recommend that AHSS respect that OTL does not provide formal evaluation of faculty.**
- 4. We recommend that AHSS advise departments to utilize OTL for help in designing a more balanced evaluation of teaching.**

### 3. Teaching Portfolios

The AHSS teaching committee suggests that one useful way for professors, department chairs, and administrators to evaluate teaching is for every professor to create and maintain a teaching portfolio. Teaching portfolios are frequently used by academic job applicants, but they are also used by some academic institutions for evaluation, tenure, and promotion. Individual professors also maintain portfolios for the purposes of promoting and sharing information about their teaching. At DU, a modified teaching portfolio is used for the purposes of tenure and promotion, so professors and administrators are familiar with the concept. Currently, professors are asked to provide examples of teaching performance which are compiled in binders and used for tenure and promotion committees. Such “evidence of teaching” includes:

- Sample syllabi
- Sample assignments
- All comments and data from student evaluations of teaching (SET) during period in question
- Numerical summaries of SET data during period in question
- Letters from students, alumni, or colleagues evaluating teaching

“Evidence of teaching” includes both numerical and qualitative data from SET, and, as the committee has observed and discussed, SET data can be a highly problematic measure of teaching performance.

The committee recommends the use of teaching portfolios by individual professors as a method for measuring teaching performance. Likewise, teaching portfolios should be used to measure the efforts by individual professors to improve their teaching. Teaching portfolios would be a more accurate and fair measure of teaching performance than SET.

#### I. Composition of Teaching Portfolios

The committee does not wish to place excessive burdens on individual faculty members in creating and maintaining a teaching portfolio. Therefore, the committee envisions the structure of portfolios as a menu of options whereby an individual professor can choose various ways to demonstrate success in teaching. A menu of options allows for individual, departmental, and disciplinary flexibility, allowing professors to exercise creativity in the classroom, to focus on specific pedagogical skills, or to adjust to specific demands on research or service in a given year.

To these ends, a teaching portfolio, submitted as part of the annual review process to department chairs and the dean, and collected through the years to become part of a larger portfolio for mid-tenure review and tenure and/or promotion, can be comprised of the following:

- Sample syllabi from classes or syllabi from the entire year of teaching. Reflections on the construction and implementation of the syllabi would be helpful.
- Sample assignments from a specific class, with reflections if possible.

- Examples of graded student work, reflections on the grading process, rationale, or technique would be helpful.
- Reports from faculty who visit the classroom, with a written response from the professor observed.
- Evidence of participation in any of DU's programs available to assist with teaching. Evidence would consist of a description of faculty participation, and if participation in the program has already occurred, a self-evaluation of outcomes.
  - The following offices and programs already offer opportunities for improving teaching effectiveness:
    - The Office of Teaching and Learning (OTL)
    - Marsico Funds for visiting scholars
    - Funds from the library to assist teaching (such as the Moreland grant)
    - CCESL
    - Office of Diversity and Inclusion
- Evidence of participation in a non-DU related program that supports teaching, for example, participation in a conference or workshop dedicated to teaching practices.
- Evidence and reflection of a student evaluation at midterm for a specific class. Faculty should include the midterm evaluation questions, data from student responses, and a reflection on what faculty did to address student comments throughout the second half of the course.
- Evidence of applying for and/or winning a grant (DU or non-DU) to fund teaching efforts.
- Description of and reflection on the relationship between faculty research interests and classroom teaching.
- Description of and reflection on a specific innovation in teaching (team-teaching, for example, or using new resources in the classroom).

A reasonable number of items should be included in the portfolio, ideally four or five, but a minimum of three items. Faculty should maintain a teaching portfolio as a regular, yearly practice and submit teaching portfolios as part of a mid-tenure review process, and for tenure and promotion cases.

## **II. Benefits**

- Teaching portfolios constitute a more scholarly approach to evaluating teaching effectiveness, allowing for careful reflection by professors and encouraging professors to think about teaching as it relates to their research.
- A varied menu of options allows individual faculty members to expand teaching practices by taking advantage of teaching support offered at DU.
- Requiring the yearly submission of portfolios encourages professors who are tenured to continue to improve their teaching even when the professor may receive generally good or acceptable SET. Conversations with OTL staff indicate that few associate or full professors utilize their resources.

- Portfolios allow departmental chairs to understand what individual professors believe is successful about their teaching, or conversely, what may need additional effort.
- Portfolios encourage, but don't require, innovation.

### **Recommendations:**

- 1. The Committee recommends that AHSS adopt teaching portfolios as a major evaluative tool for assessing the quality of teaching.** Teaching portfolios allow professors to assume a more active role in evaluating and shaping their teaching practices. In comparison, DU's current system of evaluating teaching, SET, situates professors in a primarily reactive role, having to respond to problematic student quantitative and qualitative data.
- 2. The Committee recommends that the Dean's office seriously consider rewarding faculty for exceptional teaching or particularly innovative course design and/or delivery based on the yearly review of teaching portfolios.** Yearly "AHSS innovators in teaching" awards could be given to AHSS faculty after the administrative review of portfolios, in recognition of faculty who have done extraordinary work in the classroom. Awards for effective or innovative teaching might serve as an incentive for good teaching practices. Moreover, awards can likely be granted without much additional cost to the University (faculty could receive a free parking pass for a year, or a Ritchie Center membership, or a gift card for Newman Center events).
- 3. The Committee recommends that a portfolio system be used to encourage more professors to take advantage of the resources and services provided by the OTL.** Conversations with personnel from the Office of Teaching and Learning reveal that more could be done to bring greater numbers of professors in contact with OTL. Faculty unfamiliar with OTL or CCESL may be encouraged to work with these existing institutions as part of the portfolio process.

### **References:**

Teaching portfolios are used for a variety of purposes, most notably in academic job applications, but also for tenure and promotion and publicizing one's own teaching. A select internet bibliography describing the contents and assessing the effectiveness of teaching portfolios includes:

Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching: <https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/teaching-portfolios/>

University of Michigan Center for Research on Learning and Teaching:

[http://www.crlt.umich.edu/sites/default/files/resource\\_files/CRLT\\_no11.pdf](http://www.crlt.umich.edu/sites/default/files/resource_files/CRLT_no11.pdf)

Brown University Harriet W. Sheridan Center for Teaching and Learning:

<https://www.brown.edu/about/administration/sheridan-center/sites/brown.edu/about/administration/sheridan-center/files/uploads/TeachingPortfolio.pdf>

Duquesne University Center for Teaching Excellence:

<http://www.duq.edu/about/centers-and-institutes/center-for-teaching-excellence/academic-careers/landing-an-academic-job/teaching-portfolio>

#### 4. Best Practices for Undergraduate Education

There remains substantial scholarly disagreement about what constitutes effective teaching and learning. Nonetheless, researchers have reached a consensus regarding best practices for improving undergraduate education (Chickering and Gamson, 1987). These practices support the acquisition of information by students and foster analytical and critical skills. The literature on quality teaching and learning in higher education offers a series of principles as guidelines for instituting effective pedagogical strategies.

**We recommend that AHSS adopt and disseminate these principles for good undergraduate teaching.**

##### Principles of Good Undergraduate Teaching:

- **Encourages student-instructor contact.** Frequent student-instructor interaction, both in and out of classes, is a key factor to support student participation and motivation.
- **Encourages cooperation among students.** Good learning is based on cooperation, not isolation or competition. Through class discussions and/or working in groups, students sharpen their ideas, deepen their understanding, and improve their ability to interact with different viewpoints and backgrounds.
- **Encourages active and experiential learning.** Teaching should not only rely on lecturing and passive testing, but should also involve active applications, including such methods as writing, discussions, presentations, service learning, internships, study abroad, and community outreach.
- **Provides timely and constructive feedback.** Students need frequent opportunities to receive evaluation on their performance and multiple occasions to demonstrate progress. Instructors should provide prompt grading, including written comments on the strengths/weaknesses of their tests/papers.
- **Communicates high expectations.** Research shows that when instructors hold high expectations, students perform better. Towards this goal, instructors should make high expectations attainable; when appropriate, instructors should also be encouraging and enthusiastic in their interaction with students. From the beginning of the course, students should know that they are expected to work hard, and should receive guidelines to understand what is required of them.
- **Respects diverse talents and learning styles.** Students need to be provided with opportunities to demonstrate their talents and learn by being exposed to a variety of activities, assessment methods, and teaching tools (e.g., videos, lectures, group projects, discussions, different assignment types, etc.).
- **Is adaptable and responsive.** Pedagogical practices should be empathetic; instructors should be flexible to students' individual needs, while also holding them to the same standards.
- **Is respectful and appreciative of diversity within the student group based on gender, religion, race, ethnicity, sexual identity, and socio-economic background.** Instructors need to strive to create an environment in which students can feel safe to participate in class discussions and voice their perspective. Specifically, instructors need to establish norms of conduct that promote an inclusive classroom; in addition, instructors should ensure that class materials support and respect diversity.

- **Communicates effective time use.** As part of their learning process, students need to become familiar with effective time management. In this regard, instructors should provide guidance on the amount of time they should expect to prepare for classes, and should help students understand the importance of scheduling and regular work patterns (by also helping them improve their study habits).
- **Is impactful.** Teaching should have a long-lasting impact on the intellectual development of a student.
- **Is meaningful and relevant.** Teaching practices should be modified according to a society's changing needs and demands.

This synopsis draws from the following:

Chickering, Arthur and Zelda Gamson. "Seven Principles for Good Practice in Higher

Education." *AAHE Bulletin*. (March 1987): 3-7. <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED282491.pdf>

"Enhancing Student Learning: Seven Principles for Good Practice."

[http://www.crlt.umich.edu/gsis/p4\\_6](http://www.crlt.umich.edu/gsis/p4_6)

## 5. Professional Conduct

Students should be able to offer comments on an individual instructor's standard of professional conduct. Student feedback would be helpful to department chairs and tenure and promotion committees. Moreover, evaluations of professional conduct would be helpful in standardizing expectations for teaching throughout the Division. Students would provide qualitative, not numerical, data assessing the following areas of conduct:

- **Absences:** Professors/Instructors should be expected to attend all classes throughout the quarter. If an instructor has an anticipated absence, this information should be clearly communicated to students in a syllabus or via Canvas. Unanticipated absences should be communicated to students as soon as possible. Instructors should work to ensure make-up classes or assignments to compensate for their absence.
- **Timeliness:** Instructors should show up for class on time and end class at appointed time.
- **Office Hours:** Instructors should hold office hours each week. Office hours should be clearly posted on a syllabus or on Canvas. Instructors should also make reasonable efforts to accommodate students who may have classes during their stated office hours.
- **Deadlines:** Instructors should make clear the nature of assignments and assignment deadlines at the beginning of the term. Instructors should, within reason, stick to assignment deadlines and any changes should be communicated clearly to all students in the class.
- **Grading:** Instructors should issue sufficient feedback on at least some of the assignments for a given class (either through written comments or in conversation). Instructors should also provide feedback in a timely fashion, so that students can understand this feedback and make improvements for the next assignment.
- **Readings:** Any readings for classes should be made accessible to students in a timely fashion, preferably at the beginning of the quarter, either through Canvas or through the purchase or rental of books.
- **Syllabus:** Instructors should make expectations for the class clear to all students, preferably through a syllabus that is discussed sometime in the first week of class.