

Notes from the Fall 2001 Senate Retreat on Evaluation of Teaching Effectiveness

Overview

During the morning session, we heard from three panels about various aspects of evaluating teaching effectiveness at SJSU, discussed the meaning of teaching effectiveness, and heard an update on the revision of the SOTE from SERB. In the afternoon, we heard from the last two more panels. There were also two short presentations on the traits of effective peer review, and we discussed what improvements we should make to the peer review process at SJSU and what actions we would like to see the Senate take given the day's discussion on an evaluation system that is not perfect.

Following are summaries of the day's discussions and presentations.

Introductory Comments

Annette Nellen, Vice-Chair of the Senate and Retreat Coordinator, pointed out that the Retreat gives us a chance to get to know each other, have a good time, and discuss an important topic with our colleagues to share ideas and gain new perspectives. The topic of this Retreat also allows us to give input to SERB and Professional Standards on their work, and to take information back to our departments and colleges to perhaps, reconsider the evaluation of teaching effectiveness systems used in those units.

Nellen shared three of her new perspectives on evaluation of teaching effectiveness that she gained from preparing for the Retreat:

1. Beyond Summative Review: SOTEs, peer reviews and portfolio are not just for summative evaluation purposes. These are tools that should also lead us to ask questions – what can we do better or differently in the future. These tools help assess student learning. These tools can also be used to discuss teaching strategies with our colleagues to find new ways to teach and assess. McKeachie's article – "Student Ratings of Teaching," notes that greater improvement comes when ratings are discussed with colleagues.
2. Applying Research Standards to Teaching Evaluation: Perspectives on the usefulness of evaluating teaching effectiveness change if we analogize it to our research. For example, we are usually willing to redo our research – why not also our teaching techniques. Also, research is opened up to the peer review process – we talk about it with our colleagues, present it to others, let others ask questions and to challenge our findings – why not also discuss our teaching in the same way? Finally, once we finish one aspect of our research, we ask ourselves – "what did I learn and what am I going to do next? Why not ask that same question after reviewing SOTEs, peer review forms and student assessment data?"
3. Usefulness to Students: The McKeachie article states: "Student time is used to fill out the ratings, but the students get little benefit from the time they invest. They are not encouraged to think about their own learning and their own responsibility for learning. Answering the questions should be an educational experience, not a mindless appraisal of the teacher."

Should students be assessing their own learning and contribution to it along with evaluating the teacher's contribution to their learning process? The MUSE seminar program will get students focused on their role and responsibilities in the learning process. So, why not have students evaluate how they contributed to the learning process so they can identify anything they might want to do differently next time. How would we do this? Perhaps this is something we should also focus on besides improving our evaluation of teaching effectiveness process.

The Meaning of Teaching Effectiveness

Comments from the breakout groups:

- Reaching students with different learning styles; organized/structured; flexibility; set clear goals and objectives; motivate and inspire students, fair or at least the perception of fairness; open to suggestions for improvement; and current in the field.
- The professor is not the only teacher in the classroom. The class is student-centered and thus the “instructor” is not the only measure of teaching effectiveness.
- Competent technically (skill sets); have a rationale for their actions based on theory.
- Serve as resource specialist in a broad sense especially in terms of knowledge base.
- Build a learning environment that is accessible. This learning environment should include the ability to challenge the instructor to move beyond the “expertise of instructor and value student opinions to help student develop the ability to think on their own.
- Teaching is effective if someone outside the discipline can come into the classroom and understand what is being taught.
- Having time to reflect, share and integrate.
- Providing thought in developing courses and curriculum.
- Accomplishment of what you intended to do and allowing the students to accomplish what they were hoping to accomplish.
- Students get something in every class that they didn’t know/understand before – something relevant.
- Teaching effectiveness varies depending upon the academic and social purpose of a course.
- Is there a way to measure improvement over time looking for elements from the past?
- How do you get students receptive to good teaching and not resent a challenge?
- I think that students should leave my class with more questions than answers so that they will continue to be curious and to think critically throughout their lives.
- How do you measure increasing a student’s curiosity, desire to learn, synthesizing the relevance of real life to the course work. None of our assessment does that.
- Effectiveness is a function of (a) target groups or types of students, and (b) class size – individualize vs. standardize.
- Teach students to apply facts and content in creative ways.
- Excitement for content; positive long-term impact on students beyond the university; believes in the potential of all; engaging the students, knowing or getting to know your students; persistent; notices students; works with all the students; believes that s/he can have an impact on all the students; wants to communicate content; helps students be critical thinkers; and helps students to continue to think in context of subject matter.
- Motivates students and allows themselves to be affected by the students and make adjustments.
- Teaching effectiveness could be measured in terms of 1) progress, 2) achievement, and 3) behavioral/cultural/attitudinal shifts which are hard to measure. Teaching effectiveness in ideal terms, means teaching to all students equally, regardless of demographics.
- Teaches students to “love learning” – become life long learners.
- Peer review of research is confidential, peer review of teaching is not.

- Refereed review of research looks at sources.
- We need to rethink ourselves – we can't be “commuter professors.”

Nellen reminded participants to look at some examples of defining teaching effectiveness that other schools have used – see the Retreat web site.

Panel Questions for Administrators

[President Caret, Provost Goodman, AVP Faculty Affairs Peter Lee]

- What is the key strength of our current system of evaluating and documenting teaching effectiveness?
- What is the key weakness, if any?
- What would you recommend to the campus to build a climate that is more positive towards teaching evaluation and better recognizes the benefits of evaluation and discussion of teaching and learning?

Comments:

- The current RTP policy (S98-8) works well because it allows for some flexibility and different models of success. It has also created a campus culture of summative review.
- Weaknesses:
 - ✓ SOTEs have not been reformed for over 10 years
 - ✓ SOTEs overemphasized in RTP, but not utilized enough for improving instruction
 - ✓ 9/10 peer reviews are positive; they do not distinguish among faculty; doesn't add much to the review process
 - ✓ peer reviews are sometimes out of sync with the SOTE scores
 - ✓ We need a culture of effective teaching
 - ✓ We are too overworked – too many people to review
 - ✓ Our current review practices are too quantitative and not qualitative enough – could use more reflection
- Recommendations for improvement:
 - ✓ Need a learner-centered approach
 - ✓ Need a more thorough plan – focused on continuous improvement
 - ✓ Need to train the evaluators
 - ✓ Expand what we review
 - ✓ Need more of a course portfolio approach that assesses student learning and the instructor's own progress – how they modified the course, etc.
 - ✓ Look more at student learning and building a broad continuum of learning rather than just looking at results in one course.
 - ✓ Incorporate more reflection into the review process.
 - ✓ Encourage reciprocal peer review – allow the reviewee to visit reviewer's class.

Panel Questions for Deans [Dean Andrew and Dean Sigler]

- Is there sufficient evidence of teaching effectiveness in dossiers? If not, what else would be helpful?
- What helps you predict *continued* good teaching performance for tenure and promotion decisions?

Comments:

- How the reviewee presents themselves in their dossier is very important
- Dean is key to setting the culture of sharing ideas and resources in the college – importance of teaching and collegiality of it; can set a culture of professional development by involving all in the peer review process.
- Departments need to be sure peer reviews are done timely and effectively.
- Factors that help predict continued good teaching:
 - ✓ Hire well – be sure recruit makes a presentation to a class of students.
 - ✓ Is the person who proactively seeks feedback on how to continually improve (such as getting mid-semester feedback from students and talking about teaching improvement with colleagues)?
 - ✓ Has a passion for teaching – but how do you document this?
 - ✓ Believes all students can learn.
 - ✓ Cares about students; has no disdain for students.
 - ✓ Can state their teaching philosophy.
 - ✓ Can find patterns in reviewing SOTEs.
 - ✓ Should offer formative peer review and mentoring.

Panel Questions for Students [AS President Martinez]

- What traits does an effective teacher have?
- What limitations or frustrations do you find, if any, with the current SOTE?
- What additional input, if any, would you like to be able to provide about your professors?

Comments:

- Traits of an effective teacher:
 - ✓ Challenges students
 - ✓ Flexibility
 - ✓ Involving students in discussion and shaping of instruction; is aware of other demands on students
- SOTE issues
 - ✓ Students are not told what they are used for
 - ✓ System wants input now, but no one asks for input when change is asked for
 - ✓ Students don't know results
 - ✓ Doing them at the end of class when incentive is high to just leave early – why not do them at beginning of class if they are important?

- SJSU should better “promote” faculty accomplishments – would help to make students proud of being here – a shared sense of pride.
- Should let students help in setting expectations for a class and prof and students should regularly check in to see if the expectations are being met.

SERB Update

See the powerpoint presentation by Stan Malos and Andrea Whittaker on the Retreat website.

Panel Questions for Department Chairs [Chairs Stacks and Veregge]

- In reviewing a dossier for RTP, what helps you evaluate teaching effectiveness?
- How could a department implement an effective process to allow for a culture of teaching that encourages discussion of teaching practices and formative evaluations?
- Are different systems needed for evaluation of teaching effectiveness for tenure-track faculty and adjunct faculty? Explain.

Comments:

- Reflective comments help in reviewing a dossier and explanation so of the documents, rather than the documents along.
- Chairs should encourage faculty to get dossiers together early so there is time to add reflective statements.
- A self evaluation statement can be helpful to gauge the professor’s perspective and dedication to teaching.
- Look for trends.
- Look at teaching materials – creativity.
- Culture of teaching – need parallel processes: 1) professional advancement and 2) conversation about teaching – where it is not viewed as threatening or summative evaluation. Can this occur in a department where the RTP process is centered?
- Culture needs to be expressed down from the President to the faculty. Should be reinforced through the hiring process. Brown bag discussions where faculty share issues and questions are helpful.
- We don’t have enough rewards for good teaching.
- Do we have a university-wide consensus as to what effective teaching is and best practices?
- Why not have a peer review process without numbers – to help make it more developmental?
- We need a system where it is easier for first-year faculty to attend/participate in workshops on teaching – peer partners, visits to others’ classes.
- Since expectations for temporary and regular faculty are different, so should be evaluation practices be different.

Panel Questions for Tenure Track and Recently Tenured Faculty [Professors Matthes and Williams]

- How helpful do you believe the input has been that you have received on the evaluation of your teaching effectiveness?
- What type of input would you like about your teaching that you are not presently receiving, if anything?
- What is your reaction to having some type of formative review included in the RTP process (assume the results would not be included in your dossier unless you chose to include them)?

Comments:

- Coming to SJSU can easily mean a 30% increase in teaching load and a cut in pay relative to other universities.
- SOTEs are tied to pay so they are important.
- SOTEs should be mandated for all courses – that would have a more meaningful effect on norms and students should be allowed to evaluate all courses.
- SOTE results should be available when grades are turned in – why the delay until the start of the subsequent semester – that diminishes their value to improve teaching effectiveness.
- Some type of system for anonymous mid-semester review would be helpful.
- Example of an effective peer review:
 - ✓ Reviewer asked what instructor's goals were
 - ✓ Graded work was reviewed
 - ✓ Was a discussion afterwards over coffee
- We should train students to complete a SOTE. Rating scale needs to be meaningful. At SJSU – a 3 score is not average. Perhaps should use words like – “praiseworthy, etc.
- Should peer reviews only be for developmental purposes?
- Videotaping would be helpful for formative reviews, as would critique of exams by experts, evaluation of student assignments and peer review from outside your department.
- Peer reviews are of no real value is just positive comments and no discussion.

Peer Review Processes [Presentations on selected literature by Judith Hurley and Terri Thames of the Professional Standards Committee]

- Issue – need time, money and expertise to do peer review properly
- Recommendations from CSU Peer Review Conference in 1995: improve the reward system, look at an entire career, consider use of technology and use multiple approaches
- Literature is full of lots of guidance on how to perform effective peer review – see summary comments on Terri Thames on the Retreat website.

Group Comments on How to Improve Peer Review at SJSU

There was general consensus that our current peer review system is not working as well as it should be. However, it is not necessarily the tools (peer evaluation) that are the problem – it's the way we use them. Since there is a culture of only having good peer review systems, which then don't serve much value in the evaluation system, the result is that the instructor gets little worthwhile input and evaluators may find that it is not a good use of time to even want to do peer reviews. Another problem is that faculty have the responsibility to provide effective peer reviews because the total review should not be only student evaluations – more is needed. If we don't improve the peer review process, then we are left with very few ways to evaluate teaching, which means that scholarship will become the most important dimension on which faculty are evaluated. There was general consensus that we have a culture of a teaching evaluation *process* at SJSU, but not a culture of teaching effectiveness generally. The Senate can help foster such a climate through policy.

Any improvement should consider the following:

- We should determine what we are measuring by evaluating teaching effectiveness. The current work of SERB and the peer review forms used by departments today, along with the vast literature on the subject would be good starting points for determining what we are evaluating in a peer review.
- Peer evaluators should be trained. It's sometimes difficult for faculty to appreciate and understand teaching styles other than their own. Training should also include making evaluators aware of race and gender contextual issues that might be relevant to the faculty being evaluated. Training should also focus on the type of input to give to the reviewees that would be helpful to improvement of instruction. In addition to merely evaluating them, such individuals should also be trained to help faculty members improve their teaching. Release time should be given to the trained evaluators.
- We need to determine if peer review should be done by someone outside of the reviewee's department or inside, or both.
- Perhaps peer evaluation should be a 2-stage process, with an initial formative assessment that is not part of the RTP process, followed by a summative assessment that would be a part of RTP.
- Issues of reliability and equality.
- The impact on faculty workloads.
- The process should include comments from the reviewee about their future plans for teaching – a reflective statement of what they have learned from formative review and how they plan to pursue continuous improvement.
- We need to be sure that good teaching is recognized/rewarded as much as good scholarship is recognized/rewarded.