

ACADEMY OF DISTINGUISHED TEACHING SCHOLARS

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Meeting Notes

- Date:** November 15, 2009
- Place:** 239A Tigert Hall
- Attendees:** *Distinguished Teaching Scholars:* Dr. Michael Olexa, Dr. Marianne Schmink, Dr. Nigel Richardson, and Dr. Ranga Narayanan

The Academy met on this date with the participation of the attendees listed above. The meeting started at 12:00 PM and adjourned at 1:00 PM. The subject matter discussed comprised the issues itemized below.

1 Providing feedback on Faculty Teaching Assessments to the University Senate

a. Background

The *Faculty Welfare Council* of the University of Florida Faculty Senate is addressing the issue of how to appropriately assess the teaching performance of the faculty. The council has asked the Academy for input, and Dr. Richards accepted to present to the council our suggestions on a meeting that will take place on Wednesday January 20.

Dr. Nigels invites academy members to join him in his presentation to the council this coming Wednesday. The time and place of the meeting will be announced by Dr. Richards.

b. Discussion scope

The discussion included issues regarding the suitability of the current *Student - Teacher Evaluation Form* for the purpose of assessing teacher performance in standard lectures and in workshop and laboratory type of classes, the need for availability of resources that teachers can utilize for the purpose of enhancing their teaching effectiveness.

The discussion led to the list of recommendations shown below. All participants contributed significantly towards the formulation of the recommendation set, with each contributor emphasizing different needs and opportunities based on their disciplinary background and experience. The recommendations are listed below without assigning specific credit to the original contributor.

c. List of recommendations

- (i) The evaluation of faculty teaching must be done in a fashion that does not rely in a dominant fashion on the numerical evaluations obtained from *Student - Teacher Evaluation Forms*.

Discussion. Teaching performance assessment in Tenure and Promotion cases often focuses only on the relationship between the faculty member's average and the college average. This focus on the averages fails to recognize that averages are sometimes meaningless metrics when standard deviations are not taken into consideration. Furthermore, the average fails to reveal whether a pedagogy expert would endorse as effective or reject as unacceptable the faculty member's teaching work.

The evaluation of teaching should include new dimensions beyond what is currently practiced. More specifically, a responsible and professionally conducted peer-review processes should be instated throughout the university. The *University Teaching Center* discussed in Recommendation (iii) could serve as the vehicle for carrying out these evaluations. In addition, it may be wise to require that in Tenure and Promotion cases the department's Chair and the college Dean's letters explicitly address whether the candidate's teaching promotion is acceptable or unacceptable and indicate why it is so.

- (ii) The wording of some questions in the Teacher Evaluation form needs to be revised to (a) avoid meaningless or effectively unquantifiable measures, and (b) to recognize that many questions are ill suited to serve as metrics in courses that have a small lecture component relative to experimental, workshop, studio, or one-to-one hands-on teaching components.

Discussion. Some questions in the Teacher Evaluation form seem to be of an intangible nature, and hence difficult to quantify. For example, question 5 "Respect and concern for students" is not necessarily well posed because it is not clear whether the evaluators (students) know what is meant by "respect" or "concern" in the context of a class.

Of particular relevance is the obvious unsuitability of the *Student - Teacher Evaluation Form* for courses that have a low lecture component and a higher hands-on component, such as the cases of laboratory, design-studio, or workshop type of classes. Questions on the current form are not aligned with the teaching objectives for many of those type of courses. One possible remedial solution would be to have to assessment forms, each one with a common set of 10 questions for all courses. The difference between the forms would lie on the nature of an ensuing set of 10-20 questions: one set would be geared to a mostly-lecture type of course and the second set to a mostly-hands-on type of course.

- (iii) The Council is asked to endorse the creation of a *University Teaching Center* that can provide faculty with resources that permit faculty to enhance their teaching and that can provide professional and balanced teaching assessment services throughout the university.

Discussion. The Academy recommends to the *Faculty Welfare Council* that they endorse the creation of a *University Teaching Center* with a funding allocation that will allow it to perform valuable functions that can have a concrete effect in bringing about not only improvements in the quality of the teaching assessment process but also in the quality the quality of teaching delivered to the students. These functions include the following:

- Conducting systematically and well-designed peer evaluations. The Center would create a protocol for conducting peer evaluations (say a procedural description, forms, the composition of the peer-review team), train peer-reviewers, execute the peer reviews, and report the results to relevant parties. The Center would ensure that best practices are followed, such as including an appropriately selected external reviewer and the avoidance of conflicts of interest.
- Providing teaching resources to the faculty. The Center would make available workshops, video recordings, books, and mentors that can assist faculty in the acquisition of skills that are known to enhance learning. Teachers who become better equipped with teaching techniques are more likely to not only receive better evaluations, but also to deliver a better learning experience to the students.
- Providing input to Deans and Department Chairs on needed teaching improvements. The Center would have legitimacy in approaching high-ranking university officials with suggestions on how to improve the teaching activities in specific departments of colleges, pointing out perceived weaknesses and identifying paths for introducing effective corrective measures.

2 Planned visit by the Honors Program Director

Kevin Knudsen has agreed to attend the February 5 meeting of the Academy to continue our interactions with the Honors Program, and to report on the impact of the Academy's work in reviewing course proposals.

This record of meeting notes was prepared by Dr. Nigel Richards, Chair, and by Dr. Oscar D. Crisalle, Secretary.

Respectfully submitted by

Prof. Oscar D. Crisalle

Secretary, Academy of Distinguished Teaching Scholars