Frequently Asked Questions from Deans, Chairs and Directors at UVic regarding effective teaching assessment for the purposes of annual review and merit

Adapted from a presentation given at the “Workshop on Faculty Annual Review and Merit Process”

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1. Is it even possible to define excellent teaching? How do we define excellent teaching? Teaching is so discipline-specific how could we possibly define excellence in such a way as to make it meaningful across the university? (OR the “I will know it when I see it” challenge).

Please see the “New UVic DRAFT Teaching Assessment Guidelines”
http://www.ltc.uvic.ca/servicesprograms/teachassess.php

Also Teaching Dossiers and Suggested Peer Review Process at UVic on the same web page including:
• Sample Peer Review of Teaching Observation Form
• Sample Checklist for Peer Assessment of Instructional Behaviors Observation Form

2. What is the “scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL)”? How does UVic define it? I realize it is in the Framework Agreement that we should “count” it but how do we do that in a meaningful way? How do we assess SoTL in such a way as to maintain quality and integrity? Where do departments and faculties “count” faculty SoTL work—is it (should it be) part of the research/scholarly record or part of the teaching dossier?

1. Ernest Boyer’s now seminal work, Scholarship Reconsidered (1990) discusses the four scholarships of which SoTL is the “oft overlooked scholarship.”
2. In Scholarship Assessed (1997) Glassick, et al., offer 5 universal questions for assessing scholarship of any kind that are helpful to consider and should apply to SoTL as well as to any others (such as the more traditional “scholarship of discovery”).
   • Are the scholar’s goals clear?
   • Has the scholar prepared adequately for the project?
   • Does the scholar use appropriate methods?
   • Does the scholar obtain significant results and communicate effectively?
   • Does the scholar engage in reflective critique?
3. Lee Shulman, past President of the Carnegie Foundation, (in numerous public presentations and publications) also offers that SoTL should be both (1) peer-reviewed and (2) public.

At UVic practices for inclusion of SoTL in the tenure/promotion process vary. Some include it in the teaching dossier (e.g. often in Humanities) whereas some count it as part of the research record on the CV (e.g. often in Engineering). As long as it is clearly communicated ahead of time and approaches are consistent within a department, I would suggest the specific location does not matter.
3. Why is graduate student mentoring not counted in our valuation of faculty work? How can such mentoring be counted effectively in my faculty’s work? Similarly, how should we “count” the development of (1) courses “for” the department such as foundation or capstone courses, (2) service learning or community-based research courses?

This question is based on an inaccurate assumption. Some things to consider…

- The purview of departments and faculties in adjusting local practices to meet their needs.
- Careful reading of assessment policies vs. practices and choices regarding interpretation (close reading of the Framework Agreement suggests that some of the assumptions contained within the above questions are not necessarily correct—for example many departments do choose to “count” graduate mentoring or foundation course development in their assessment formulae).

4. What is/should be the relationship between the assessment of teaching for annual merit and the assessment of teaching for promotion and tenure decisions? How does/should the documentation “line up”? How can I help my faculty save time in both processes while improving the quality (and simultaneously the brevity) of their dossiers? How can I more effectively assess a teaching dossier’s quality?

Please refer to the LTC teaching assessment website http://www.ltc.uvic.ca/servicesprograms/teachassess.php.

In general Annual Teaching Activity Reports (that were previously referred to erroneously as “short form teaching dossiers”) should provide the background data and “build” towards the full teaching dossier, which should only be used for key career moments (like getting a job, promotion and tenure, promotion to full professor, etc.).

Using a “teaching dossier” matrix both to construct a dossier and to evaluate it subsequently can save large amounts of time. http://www.ltc.uvic.ca/servicesprograms/teachingdossiers.php

5. What tips do you have for giving effective feedback to faculty on their teaching (and research) performance?

Basic tips regarding giving effective feedback
1. Prepare carefully
2. Create the appropriate environment
3. Feedback should be:
   - Timely
   - Well-balanced (sandwich your comments—i.e. positive-constructive-positive)
   - Behavioral and formative rather than personal
     - What can she/he do differently?
     - What resources and support are available?
Avoid such non-specific statements (even if “positive”) as…“You have done a very good job teaching in all of your courses,” “Your research is right on track,” “Just keep doing whatever you are doing,” “There seem to be some concerns about your teaching/research but I wouldn’t worry about it”

- Illustrated with specific examples

6. Should I include Senior Instructors in the same pool as research faculty given the different ratios applied to their assessment or use a separate pool for them?

Practices vary but what we are generally seeing is that departments/schools, who have one or two SIs, keep them in the general pool; whereas as the number of SIs increases (say to 4-5) then departments/schools are often separating them out into their own pool.

7. What must I take into account in order to fairly contextualize Course Experience Survey results?

The three factors that we know for sure (according to the literature) that impact CES results are: (1) academic area, (2) course level, and (3) whether or not the course is required. It would therefore be unwise to simply rank colleagues for teaching assessment purposes according to their CES instructor “scores.”

Please note that quantitative data from students alone are totally inadequate as comprehensive measures of the quality of teaching (since they only give data from one source). Other sources of data are essential for a rounded picture (such as peer evaluation) and are generally found in an annual teaching activity report. For further information on this and all other matters related to CES please see [http://www.ltc.uvic.ca/initiatives/CES.php](http://www.ltc.uvic.ca/initiatives/CES.php), which includes...

- Using the New Course Experience Survey to Assess and Improve Teaching at UVic: A manual of best practices
- Selected Resources Available for Instructors Linked to Individual CES Items
- Faculty-wide norms for comparative purposes.

In addition, the departmental folders on the CES SharePoint site now provide departmental/school summaries analyzed by level in order that chairs/directors/deans can take this variable into consideration in making their decisions.