



## PEER REVIEW OF TEACHING FOR FACULTY PERSONNEL REVIEW

**The Problem:** Macalester's current practice for evaluating teaching effectiveness for personnel reviews involves soliciting letter from students and alums. While letters from faculty colleagues who have reviewed the faculty member's teaching may be included in the file, they are not required. Further, members of the Candidate Review Committee need to make judgments about the faculty member's effectiveness as a teacher, but no guidance is provided about the process through which these judgments might be made. In some departments, senior colleagues visit classes for extended periods of time, in others they visit once or twice, while in others they never visit. No guidance is given on the aspects of teaching effectiveness that faculty peers are particularly suited to evaluate.

In addition, while we require a professional development plan from faculty under review, we provide no guidance about how they might most effectively reflect on their teaching in this document. While some faculty detail their teaching philosophies and provide descriptive information about course design and the choice of teaching topics and methods, many do not provide this level of reflection on their teaching practice in the PDP.

**An Approach To The Assessment of Teaching Effectiveness Through Peer Review:** The literature on the evaluation of teaching stresses that information on teaching effectiveness must come from multiple sources because teaching is a complex process, involving myriad professional choices, which cannot be evaluated adequately by student perspectives alone. For example:

**Students** can assess the impact of the course on their learning. They can assess the impact of the teaching strategies and methods (e.g. lecture, group work, projects, papers, etc) as well as the effectiveness of the personal teaching style of the professor (e.g. approachability, enthusiasm, respect, turn-around time for feedback, etc.)

**Faculty peers** can assess the subject matter expertise, the currency and appropriateness of teaching materials (e.g syllabus, handouts, media support) and methods (e.g. lecture, group work, case studies, writing assignments, assessment methods), the level of the course difficulty and challenge, the alignment of course goals with department or college goals, and the appropriateness of the workload of the course for the faculty member in the context of other duties and commitments.

**The instructor** can provide descriptive information about the course, its design, the rationale for the choice of materials and methods, and the teaching philosophy that guides the relationship with students and choice of teaching approaches.

## **The Complexity of the Task**

One of the strengths of Macalester's curriculum is the degree of autonomy faculty members have in choosing the topics, materials, and methods they will use in designing and teaching their courses. As a faculty, we offer a wide range of excellent teaching approaches, that vary by discipline, faculty personality, and teaching philosophies. It is impossible, and undesirable, to develop one standardized definition of good teaching that applies across all disciplines and faculty.

How, then, are we to evaluate good teaching for the purposes of faculty review, and for mentoring faculty to become better at this complex craft? Peer reviewers must be careful to base their evaluation on widely accepted standards and practices, and not on personal preferences or choices that work for them, but may not work for other faculty members or courses. This document provides some guidance that should help peer reviewers to make these distinctions.

## **The Peer Review Process**

Effective peer review of teaching for summative evaluation involves four steps:

1. An interview with the instructor in which the course or courses to be reviewed are discussed. The instructor may wish to put these reflections in writing as well. The interview should include
  - a. The overall goals of the course(s)
  - b. Rationale for the choice of topics, materials, teaching methods and assessment method in the course(s)
  - c. Perceived successes and challenges in teaching the course(s)
  - d. Level of faculty workload of the course(s)
2. The review of course materials and student work
  - a. Syllabus and schedule
  - b. Handouts, course packets, study guides and/or reading guides
  - c. Examples of media support used in course
  - d. Tests, writing assignments, project assignments, etc.
  - e. Examples of a range of graded papers, projects, exams, etc.
3. Classroom observation
  - a. Multiple reviewers and multiple class visits are required for summative evaluation to be reliable
  - b. Observers should use guidelines that focus their observations on teaching characteristics that are appropriate for peer review assessment.
4. Feedback to faculty member
  - a. In the faculty review process, the consensus evaluation from the peer review of teaching should be detailed in the CRC letter.

## **Guidelines for the Review of Course Materials**

Guidelines outlined here are modified from Nancy Van Note Chism, *The Peer Review of Teaching*.

### **The Syllabus**

- **Completeness**
  - Course information
  - Instructor information
  - Information on course readings
  - Goals and objectives of the course
  - Communication of the level of challenge of the course
  - Policies regarding grading, academic misconduct, late work, absences, accommodation for special needs
  - Calendar of class activities
  - Description of assignments and due dates
  - Support services available
- **Clarity**
  - Is the syllabus clear and easy to follow?
  - Is information internally consistent?
- **Appropriateness of tone**
  - Does the syllabus signal a respectful relationship toward students?
  - Is the syllabus motivational rather than threatening?
- **Currency of content**
  - Do the course topics represent the current state of the field?
  - Do the text and other materials reflect the latest scholarship in the field?
- **Fit within the department curriculum**
  - Is the course taught at the appropriate level within the department curriculum?
  - Are the course materials appropriate for the level of the course in the curriculum?
  - Does the course provide the prerequisite coverage required for subsequent courses in the curriculum?
- **Level of challenge**
  - Does the course require an appropriate and reasonable workload for students given that the course is one of four being taken?
  - Do the course materials, exams, and assignments provide an appropriate level of challenge for students?
- **Pacing**
  - Is the course calendar realistic?
  - Has the instructor chosen a reasonable amount of content to cover in the time allotted?
  - Are due dates for assignments distributed well?

### **Course packets, readings, textbooks, multimedia assignments.**

- Are the materials appropriate and effective given the course goals?

- Are the materials current?
- Do the materials provide a balanced view of the current controversies in the discipline?
- Are the materials interesting and likely to stimulate student interest in the field?
- Is the level of difficulty in the reading assignments appropriate for the level of the course?
- Is the amount of reading or viewing appropriate?
- Do these study and/or reading guides seem helpful in focusing student studying or reading to facilitate learning?
- Do study guides represent an appropriate level of difficulty or degree of coverage of material?

### **Examples of media support used in course**

- Does the media used in the course represent the latest available content and technology?
- Does the choice of media for the course seem effective in supporting student learning?
- If possible, is media used in the course made available to students outside of class time for individual review?

### **Tests, writing assignments, project assignments, etc.**

- Are the exams in the course written at an appropriate level of difficulty?
- Do exams seem to be a reasonable length?
- Are exam questions clear and easily interpreted?
- If appropriate for course goals, do exams include questions that allow students to demonstrate higher order thinking skills?
- Do the writing or project assignments support student learning in the course?
- Are the writing or project assignments appropriate for the level of the course?
- Are assignments clearly written, with expectations easy to understand?
- Are criteria for excellent, good, average and poor work clearly explained through rubrics or other methods?

### **Examples of a range of graded exams, papers, projects, etc.**

- Does the best student work in the course meet a high standard of performance?
- Is the instructor's feedback appropriate and helpful for students at all levels of performance? Is feedback
  - Clear?
  - Legible?
  - Constructive?
  - Motivational toward further improvement?
  - Appropriate for level of expectations?
  - Accurate?
  - Appropriate in amount?

## Guidelines for Classroom Observation

Classes should be visited multiple times by each person asked to provide an evaluation of teaching for the personnel review process. The following guidelines can be used to evaluate teaching. Faculty should be careful to assess teaching effectiveness in terms of what is working for the observed faculty member, and not based on his/her own teaching preferences.

- Was the instructor prepared for class?
  - Instructor has a clear sense of what will be accomplished in the class period
  - Notes, media, handouts all ready when needed
- Was the class period organized and easy for students to follow?
- Were the teaching methods used in class appropriate and effective?
  - Do the teaching methods used in class reflect appropriate practices for the discipline?
  - Do the teaching methods used in class maximize the opportunity for active student learning?
  - Does the instructor demonstrate skill in using the teaching method chosen (e.g. effective at leading class discussions; effective at directing group work in class; effective lecturer, etc)
  - Did the teaching methods support the course goals? For example, did the instructor use methods that help student develop
    - higher order thinking skills
    - skills at critical analysis
    - problem-solving skills
    - creativity
    - respect for diverse perspectives
    - other stated course goals
- Was the instructor's content knowledge current and extensive?
- Did the instructor exhibit good presentation skills, including
  - Clarity?
  - Appropriate pacing?
  - Good fluency?
  - Eye contact?
  - Gestures?
  - Voice and tone?
  - Rate of speech?
- Did the instructor appear to have good rapport with students in the class?
  - Instructor addresses students by name
  - Students seems willing to talk
  - Instructor holds students' attention
  - Instructor accepts and responds to student comments appropriately