

Peer Review of Teaching

Issues and concerns raised during general discussion at University Senate (April 9, 2001)

- a. *Are the “expected” reviews during years one, three, and five required for tenure-track faculty?*

Response: Item number six of the recommendations presented to the members of the University Senate on April 9, 2001 has been removed from the current recommendations (May 7, 2001).

- b. *Are 10 people sufficient to serve as mentors? (Calculations were presented to justify initiating the process with 10 mentors for number of courses to be reviewed each year.)*

Response: Ten mentors will be adequate under the revised recommendations that peer review of teaching be first implemented with a limited scope and on a voluntary basis, in order to provide experience with the process before potential campus-wide implementation. The experience gained during the pilot phase will help identify the absolute number of institutional mentors required.

The proposed peer review process continues to contain four levels of breadth or complexity where formative aspects, including peer review activities within departments and programs, do not require training for the reviewers. (See the Web-site for more information.) Training would necessarily be involved for the higher levels of accomplishment or where the faculty member wished that a summative peer review be available for promotion, tenure, and evaluation purposes or for demonstration of teaching merit.

Research on peer review of instruction has found that the reliability of expanded peer review (including observation, interviewing of students, etc.) is increased through training of observers. However, in the case of informal reciprocal review between faculty, training should not be necessary and the institutional peer reviewers would not be involved.

- c. *How would this process apply to tenure-track faculty already here? (Answer was to include them in the process at whatever year was appropriate. New faculty members would begin the process during their first year at NDSU.)*

Response: The revised recommendations call for voluntary participation across all levels of faculty and at a level that seems appropriate to the individual faculty member.

- d. *How many hours would be needed for all steps of a peer review? (Answer was 12 hours.) Comments indicated that this may be an optimistic view of actual time to complete a peer review.*

Response: The literature identifies approximately nine hours of time expected for

activities associated with two observations of classroom teaching for a single course by trained reviewers. Interviewing students in the classroom or in a setting outside of the normal classroom could require two hours, as could reviewing Student Rating of Instruction. A complete review of a syllabus could require approximately three hours of time. Again, an individual faculty member may elect to have a review conducted that is elaborate or simple. The amount of time required would be linked to this choice. The literature indicates, however, that the more comprehensive the review, the more valuable that it is perceived to be by an individual faculty member.

- e. *What is the cost estimate for released time for mentors? (A per course range was cited.)*

Response: As initially proposed, the cost was estimated at a range of approximately \$20,000 to \$40,000 for a core of 10 Peer reviewers.

- f. *How realistic is it to expect that the community has available and qualified replacements for mentors?*

Response: The academic community at North Dakota State University is relatively large and diverse, but it is not possible to anticipate all possible conditions and circumstances. As a result, some excellent Peer Reviewers may not be able to participate to the full extent possible or may delay their leadership in the peer review process.

In terms of replacing Peer reviewers and to provide continuity in the conduct of the process, it is our assumption that a successful review process will generate its own interested, qualified replacements.

- g. *What criteria will be used for selecting mentors? (The committee expected to identify mentors via nominations from deans and faculty.)*

Response: Teaching awards; breadth of teaching experience (first-year, senior, graduate, team-teaching involvement, etc.); recent evidence of commitment to continual development of teaching ability; strength of nominee's statement of interest and commitment; nominations from a broad base of our campus. (For example, members of the Teaching and Professional Service Committee, deans, and the Vice President for Academic Affairs are proposed to be included among the potential nominators.)

- h. *Have the politics of the campus been considered in the design of the process?*

Response: Yes, the culture of or campus has been integrated into the development of the recommended processes, development of the composition of the participants in the AAHE Summer Workshop and in communicating with the faculty.

Factors considered included: tenured or untenured status; dynamics between faculty members, their chairs, and their colleagues; distribution of individual activities and responsibilities (teaching/research/service); philosophies within departments and colleges, and individual philosophies. These factors were considered during the AAHE Summer Workshop and during discussions held after the ad hoc committee was created by the members of the Executive Committee of the University Senate.

In developing the composition of the committee, deliberate efforts were made to involve participants across campus, across academic rank, across the administrative/academic divide, and across hierarchical administrative level. Gender and minority balance was sought before and after the AAHE Summer Workshop and cross-representation with the Teaching and Professional Service Committee was achieved.

- i. *What will the current "Classroom Observation Report Form" yield? Replacing the list with observable behaviors to increase rater reliability was suggested.*

Response: The currently circulated Classroom Observation Report Form is an example based upon materials used in other universities. Improvements for any situation or item are welcomed and will obviously be made as experience is gained. We see this and all of the example materials as works in progress.

- j. *The issue of moving a formative process into a summative assessment was raised regarding the purpose and use of the results.*

Response: The intent is to emphasize the formative aspects of peer review of teaching. The use of the product for summative purposes (such as demonstration of teaching merit and improvement of instruction) would be at the discretion of individual faculty members. Our PTE processes have influence on the amount and depth of documentation.

- k. *Given that flexibility seems to be part of the plan, what legal implications are there if everyone is not reviewed equally?*

Response: The revised recommendations call for voluntary participation across all levels of faculty and should negate the legal implications suggested in the question.

- l. *What is the motivation? Is it to improve teaching or put something in a promotion, tenure, and evaluation file?*

Response: One motivation is improvement of teaching/student learning (a formative purpose). Both factors apply if the faculty member chooses to include the information in the PTE file as a summative function

- m. *Has there been any thought to gender and minority issues with this process?*

Response: Yes, these items were addressed during extensive discussions within the ad hoc Committee. The process of selecting faculty to be members of the cadre of Peer Reviewers must incorporate procedures to assure fair and equitable gender and minority representation. Similarly, the Peer Reviewers must be sensitive to any unique circumstances of women and minorities in the classroom.

- n. *What research has been reported on the benefits? (Response was to refer to the footnotes on the Rubric Format for the references by Peter Seldin and Pat Hutchings. Also, a Kansas State University web site [www.idea.ksu.edu] was identified as a source for references.)*

Response: David Bernstein's "An examination of the implementation of peer review of teaching" in the book Evaluating Teaching in Higher Education: A Vision for the Future (Katherine Ryan, 2000) presents data that documents that all instructors enjoyed and liked being involved in the peer review process and that the instructors who modified their behaviors as a result produced students whose learning was deeper and richer. David Bernstein is a professor of psychology and a Carnegie Scholar in the Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. Dr. Bernstein has been, and is, involved in several nationally funded projects on the peer review of teaching.

- o. *If the process of improving teaching is for the purpose of improving student learning, shouldn't there be a plan to determine if student learning is involved?*

Response: Department assessment reports and the University Assessment Committee are in place to address this issue.

- p. *Should recommendation number six in the peer review report be restated to comply with the NDSU policy statement in Section 332, which indicates that peer review is an option?*

Response: Item number six of the recommendations presented to the members of the University Senate on April 9, 2001 has been removed from the current recommendations (May 7, 2001).

- q. *The policy in Section 332 specifies that at least one course be reviewed. What if a person wants more than one class reviewed? Would this create a resource problem?*

Response: Implementation on a voluntary basis would not be expected to create a resource problem.

Suggestions following the discussion:

1. *Implement peer review on a voluntary basis, get experience with the process, and then consider making it a requirement.*

Response: Peer review of teaching is identified in Section 332 of the NDSU Policy Manual as a voluntary process because the language addresses information obtained from peers or students (or both).

This suggestion has been incorporated into this recommendation to be made by the members of the ad hoc Committee on Peer Review of Teaching to the members of the University Senate (May 7, 2000).

2. *Send the recommendations on peer review to departments for review.*

Response: The revised recommendations on peer review of teaching and materials developed to this point will be placed on the Web for all faculty to review.

3. *Peer review implementation for this fall seems too early.*

Response: Granted, given the tone of discussion at the University Senate meeting of April 9, 2001.