Handout Packet

- **11 Steps to Building a Campus Online-Teaching Evaluation Program**
- **Further-Reading Bibliography**

11 Steps to Building a Campus Online-Teaching Evaluation Program
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Step 1. Define scope and time.

Draft a plan for which online courses will be evaluated, and in what fashion. For example, the following scheme can align with an institution's existing policies related to face-to-face course teaching:

- All courses being offered for the first time online must be evaluated via student ratings, peer review, and self review (for formative data collection only—no summative evaluation is performed for the initial online offering).
- Second offerings of new online courses must be evaluated via self- peer-, and administrative review for summative decision-making purposes.
- All online courses taught by contingent faculty members must employ student ratings every time they are offered, and undergo administrative review at least once every two years.
- All online courses taught by tenure-track faculty members must employ student ratings at least once every three years.

The suggestion to evaluate the first semester of online delivery as a formative-only process allows faculty members to have a low-consequences opportunity to teach a course, receive feedback, and re-tool their teaching behaviors before they are observed for summative decision making.

The other part of the time equation is to set expectations for how long self-, peer-, and administrative-evaluation processes should take. Which elements within the course-management environment are to be observed? How many, and how often?

Step 2. Closely examine teaching practices.

It is easy to focus the evaluating of online teaching directly on the tools within an institution's learning management system and build evaluation processes based on faculty members' use of those tools. After all, most of these systems can generate nice, neat data sets that report things like "number of logins" and "duration of page visits." Instead, we prefer to match online-teaching methods and tool use to their corresponding categories of good teaching practice.

For instance, in examining faculty interactions in asynchronous course discussions, whether faculty members use the course-management systems' tool or some other means of communicating (such as wiki updating or voice-recording threads), we prefer to evaluate the interactions based on the quality, timeliness, and breadth of faculty members' participation. In the context of Chickering and Gamson's "Seven Principles," doing so allows us to evaluate how well the instructor "Encourages Contact Between Students and Faculty," "Develops Reciprocity and Cooperation Among Students," "Encourages Active Learning," "Communicates High Expectations," or even "Respects Diverse Talents and Ways of Learning" in a way that is not possible with nice, neat LMS reports.

Step 3. Measure and compare.

By basing evaluation outcomes on categories of teaching behavior that are shared across course-delivery modes, it becomes more likely that comparative patterns can be discerned. First, comparisons can be made across the teaching life cycle of a single faculty member. We already compare faculty members against themselves over time for face-to-face courses. Adding modality as a comparison factor adds to formative information that can be gleaned by faculty members to help show them their strengths and areas of opportunity for teaching improvement.

Second, the outcomes and ratings of online teaching can be compared, over all, against similar measures for face-to-face learning across the institution. Significant opportunity exists for what we might call "intermodal cross-pollination," in which demonstrated best practices in one delivery modality can cross over and be adapted for use in the other.

Step 4. Build the campus culture.

The first phase of adopting a new evaluation method is to form a widely-representative core committee (including administrators, full- and part-time faculty members, and students) to design the draft evaluation plan. The committee should consider the foundational criteria for the evaluative methods to be adopted, including details such as these:

- What is the institutional context and organizational structure (e.g., a small institution with a relatively flat organizational chart will approach new evaluation methods differently from a large hierarchical institution)?
- What criteria define good online teaching? How do the local faculty define good teaching (regardless of offering mode)?
- What methods can be used to measure these criteria?
- How often will these methods need to be conducted?
- Who is responsible for requesting the evaluations, setting them up, and running them? Whom can people contact if something doesn't go right?
- Who will have access to the results of the evaluations? For how long? Where/how will results be stored?
- Will each method of evaluation be performed for every faculty member? If not, are they "opt in" or "opt out"?
- Will tenure-line, full-time, and part-time faculty be evaluated using identical or audience-specific methods?
- If low scores/ratings are observed, how can faculty members remedy them? Is remediation optional or required?
- Will there be penalties for receiving low scores or for not using remediation processes?

After a detailed plan has been drafted, it will be time to start the conversation with a fuller steering committee of stakeholders.

Step 5. Identify all stakeholder groups.

While it may be tempting to begin by crafting the messages by which new evaluation methods will be communicated, the first step is to identify all affected stakeholder groups who will be involved in the process. In addition to the ones who come immediately to mind—faculty members, students, other administrators—it may be useful to think of other groups who create, use, or consume the information created in a teaching-evaluation setting, such as:

- Faculty-support staff who actually administer the online evaluation instruments.
- Departmental office staffers who tabulate results.
- The larger student community, who often share informal rating instruments on sites like ratemyprofessor.com.
- Faculty in their role as peers, who may be called on to provide informal assessment, or who may be compared against their peer groups.
- Accrediting bodies, who may wish to have access to data sets beyond the formal end-of-semester numbers.
- Bargaining-unit representatives, who will want to know how results will be used and that results are relatively equivalent across evaluation and teaching media.
- Alumni who are a rich source of feedback about what they wished had been asked about their experiences, and who, now that they are in the workplace, can provide insights to employers' needs from recent graduates.

While this is not an exhaustive list, it suggests that there many need to be several kinds of communications created, and opportunities for separate stakeholder groups to examine and respond to any proposed teaching-evaluation methods. It also helps to overcome the “silo” effect by bringing many stakeholders into conversation with each other.

Step 6. Open a dialogue about changes.

Once the stakeholder groups have been identified, the next step is to offer a results-based statement of the proposed change. By focusing on results, administrators effectively “state the case backwards” in order to show the reason for adopting the proposed changes.

For an institution adopting online electronic student surveys at mid-term (in addition to the student surveys performed at the end of the semester), such a statement might read like this one:

> In order to show students that faculty are responsive to student feedback during the semester, and in order to help increase student satisfaction and faculty members’ end-of-term student-survey scores, the university proposes adopting “information only” mid-term electronic surveys.
>
> The results of mid-term e-surveys would be reported only to the individual faculty member, and would not be used for promotion-and-tenure purposes. Studies show that faculty who demonstrate direct responses to student feedback during the semester receive higher end-of-semester rating scores.
>
> The university community is invited to examine the proposed 6-question mid-term survey instrument at [URL] until the end of the month—your feedback on it is important and will be used to tailor the tool to the needs of the university.

Allowing for conversation to happen within the scope of the proposed change is so important that scope definition is the next phase of the implementation.

Step 7. Define the scope of the changes.

During the conversation with the stakeholder groups regarding the adoption of online-teaching evaluation methods, be sure to define the scope of the change. Some key questions to answer relate to the impact of the changes on various groups:

- What types of evaluation are performed, and by whom (e.g., peer, admin “visit,” student ratings)?
- Are evaluations performed for every faculty member? If not, are they opt in or opt out?
- Who is responsible for requesting the evaluations, setting them up, and running them?
- Who has access to the results of the evaluations, for how long, and where/how are they stored?
- Whom can people contact if something doesn’t go right?
- What process is in place for improvement and continued conversation about the new methods?

These kinds of questions, and many more, are likely to come up during the pre-implementation conversations, and administrators are wise to note and respond to them. Keeping a publicly-accessible FAQ file (on the university’s web site, for example) helps to keep the boundaries of the change clear.

Also part of defining the scope is differentiating between online teaching practices and online-course design. Just as the syllabus and textbook are not usually evaluated during a face-to-face teaching evaluation, make clear which observable “teaching behaviors” are part of the evaluation of online teaching.

Step 8. Listen to (and address) obstacles.

As the conversation continues, administrators will likely compile a list of possible objections and obstacles. Some examples to anticipate include those in Patrick’s “Six Layers of Resistance to Change” (2010):

- *Layer 1: We don't agree on the problem.* Identification and confirmation of the current constraint is needed.
- *Layer 2: We don't agree on a direction for a solution.* A breakthrough idea is needed for dealing with the root cause of identified symptoms.
- *Layer 3: We don't have an effective solution.* Clear vision is needed of the system-wide solution, its desired outcomes, and its implications.
- *Layer 4: "Yes, but" (reservations about undesirable side effects).* Identification and consideration are needed regarding concerns, reservations, and risks that may be encountered in implementing the proposed solution.
- *Layer 5: We can't do it because . . .* Planning is needed to overcome obstacles to implementing the solution.
- *Layer 6: Unverbalized fear*. Comprehensive change management is needed to create personal buy-in of all key players. (Patrick, 2010, italics added)

Remember, too, that potential obstacles can also be individuals; make time to identify and talk with the "naysayers" and ask open-ended questions about how they might help to achieve the desired results. Where they overlap with the proposed changes, ask them to become vocal champions for those elements of the changes.

Step 9. Measure the impact of the implementation.

During the implementation, be sure to measure the process and outcomes using two different lenses: compare the results obtained using the new methods against the results obtained using the existing methods (if available), and—perhaps more importantly—compare the rate of adoption for the new methods against the current rate of usage for the existing methods. Using both sets of data gives a clearer picture of how much work is needed, and where, in order to maximize adoption and buy-in among all stakeholders.

Step 10. Anticipate various phases of adoption and resistance.

In order best to respond to feedback about new online-teaching evaluation methods, it will be helpful to keep a few strategies in reserve, to be used is discussion with more entrenched skeptics. The following strategies help to open meaningful dialogue (and may even help to modify the adoption project in fruitful ways—sometimes the skeptics have valid points).

- **World in a Bottle:** If all parties agree on the goals and outcomes, ask them to "work backward" from those goals, and say how they would create a program to assess online teaching effectiveness. This is often an enlightening conversation—even though it might have happened much earlier, it's never too late to get feedback from another perspective.
- **Local and Global Impact:** In cases where there is disagreement about whether the new evaluation methods would apply to a given population or individual, ask the person to define whom the new method would be appropriate for, and to define the categories that mark the "global" population versus the exceptional "local" population. This can lead to a conversation about applicability and could raise valid exceptions.
- **Are We There Yet?:** For stakeholders who resist the idea of the new evaluation methods, ask them to say how much of the new process would be all right—how far would they go if they were designing the process? Once the sticking point has been defined, see if there's agreement beyond it, too, or whether there needs to be further negotiation regarding rights and responsibilities.

What all of these strategies have in common is that they re-focus the conversation on the desired outcomes, and they allow both sides of the conversation to listen and flex in response to the inputs received.

Step 11. Create a holistic plan and processes.

The core take-away about implementing a new evaluation process for online teaching is to follow a phased approach. By creating a core committee, assessing stakeholders, opening communication, setting the scope, and then measuring and adapting as the new strategy is rolled out, one stands a much better chance of gaining buy-in and quicker adoption from faculty, students, and administrators. A large part of gaining widespread adoption of online-teaching evaluation methods is simply opening the process and demonstrating that the goals are useful, clear, and well-defined.

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