

Evaluation of Faculty According to Effective Teaching Practices

Excerpt from a Report of the Task Force on Assessing and Improving Teaching and Learning at Indiana State University

Teaching evaluation systems should be organized around characteristics crucial to the success of the teaching endeavor. As John Murray asserts, "If colleges and universities intend to include standards for good teaching when making personnel decisions, they need to be able to recognize good teaching" (1995: 61). He claims, further, that along with general research of learning and teaching, cognitive psychology is helping to reveal demonstrable characteristics of good teaching. This section aims to categorize some of the qualities scholars have identified as fundamental to student success. The sources used in this section are drawn from studies that summarize the relevant literature. What follows is an effort to consolidate this information into clusters of specific areas known to have an impact on the quality of teaching and learning.

I. Teacher's Content Expertise

A teacher's knowledge base in a subject area is fundamental to the creation and enhancement of students' opportunities to learn well.

A. Effective teachers understand their academic field well.

It is obvious that teachers must know the material well in order to instruct students accurately. More importantly, a teacher's expertise assures that content is current and taught in adequate depth. Expertise in a subject can provide a teacher with the flexibility to design and adapt material for the learner. The instructor can use this background to respond to a range of learners' needs.

Supporting claims:

-- *An instructor has a good background in the course concepts, principles, and paradigms. (Feldman, 1988)*

-- *Excellent teachers have a strong command and organization of their subject. (DuBois, 1993)*

-- *Competencies for good teachers include demonstrated mastery of the subject. (Smith and Simpson, 1995)*

-- *Good teachers are knowledgeable about their work areas and disciplines; they integrate current subject matter into their work. (McCabe and Jenrette, 1990)*

A teaching assessment program must include some way to measure and rate a faculty member's expertise in the content area. Competence includes not only content knowledge but the ability to organize, integrate, adjust, and adapt this content in ways that make it accessible and thought-provoking to the learner.

II. Course Design

The organization of course materials and activities has a profound effect on a student's possibility to succeed in a course. Effective organization goes beyond the orderly arrangement of content to involve the design of experiences that assist students in their learning. A number of course design principles that need attention.

A. Effective teachers have a clear purpose that organizes course elements.

A teacher needs to provide an organizing framework that orients students to the course's ideas, materials, and activities.

Some research that supports the need for planned organization:

-- *An instructor prepares and organizes the course. (Feldman, 1988)*

-- *Good courses are crafted. (CTL, 1997)*

-- *Excellent teachers spend considerable amount of time preparing course presentations. (DuBois, 1993)*

-- *Excellent teachers do their work in a well-prepared and well-organized manner. (McCabe and Jenrette, 1990)*

The assessment program would search for evidence of careful planning. The quality of this planning would be one indicator of the likelihood of successful learning.

B. Effective teachers communicate high but realistic expectations.

The goals of a course must be challenging enough to motivate students, yet not so demanding as to overwhelm them. The teacher must identify what Lev Vygotsky called the "zone of proximal development." The research on college teaching recognizes this balance between high expectations and adaptation to students' ability level.

The studies claim:

-- *The teacher sets and maintains high but realistic expectations & goals. (Angelo, 1993)*

-- *Good practice communicates high expectations. (Chickering and Gamson, 1987)*

-- *Excellent teachers have the ability to motivate students to form goals and succeed academically. (DuBois, 1993)*

-- *Good teachers communicate and manage appropriate expectations for achievement in the course. (Smith and Simpson, 1995)*

-- *Excellent teachers project a positive attitude about students' ability to learn. They set challenging individual and collective performance goals for themselves. (McCabe and Jenrette, 1990)*

-- *Good teachers set challenging performance goals for students. (McCabe and Jenrette, 1990)*

Realistic challenges are those deemed appropriate for students. Effective teachers are aware of their students.

-- *The teacher shows a sensitivity to and concern with students' level and learning progress. (Feldman, 1988)*

-- *The teacher selects course material suited to students' backgrounds, abilities, and interests. (Smith and Simpson, 1995)*

This balance allows for intellectual and personal growth.

-- *Students feel good courses are those where they learn a lot. (CTL, 1997)*

-- *Build confidence in students by helping them to successfully meet learning objectives. (Smith and Simpson, 1995)*

-- *Students reach beyond course content and grow as human beings. (CTL, 1997)*

-- *Good teachers enhance student motivation by demonstrating the subject's relevance to their future needs and goals. (Smith and Simpson, 1995)*

Accordingly, an assessment program must be designed to determine how well suited the course design is to students' abilities and interests. A well-constructed course (or set of activities) that is too simplistic or too challenging will not enhance students' success. It is necessary to gather and rate the appropriateness of the course's teaching materials.

C. Effective teachers match the instruction to students' learning needs and interests.

The design of a course must include deliberate connections between the subject matter and students' needs and interests, which engage them in the learning process. The various research statements below describe a number of points at which the course material should be designed to work with students' experiences.

Research on teaching suggests:

-- *Good courses are those where students can connect new information to prior knowledge. (Angelo, 1993)*

-- *Good courses are those that are relevant to students' needs and interests. (CTL, 1997)*

-- *Students become aware of their values, beliefs, preconceptions, and prior learning - and are willing to unlearn when necessary. (Angelo, 1993)*

-- *The teacher focuses student attention on what matters most. (Angelo, 1993)*

-- *Students seek and find real-world applications of what they are learning. (Angelo, 1993)*

The teaching assessment system needs a method for determining to what degree a course provides opportunities for students to develop valuable personal connections to the course content. A straightforward organization of content may ignore the need to establish bridges to learners' experiences. Good courses should demonstrate deliberate strategies for determining student needs and interests regarding content. They should be designed to help students extract main points and they should incorporate activities that connect learning to applications.

III. Instructional Delivery

Student learning is also affected by academic interactions between teachers and learners as they engage the subject matter. The various strategies and techniques that teachers use to implement the course design are critical to the learner's success. There are several key points that help teachers strengthen student learning.

A. Effective teachers use good communication skills.

It is necessary for teacher to communicate ideas clearly.

Research indicates:

-- *The [effective] instructor is clear and understandable (Feldman, 1988)*

-- *Excellent teachers communicate effectively in both written and oral form. (Smith and Simpson, 1995)*

-- *Effective teachers have the ability to present material interestingly and clearly. (Bernoff, 1992)*

-- *Excellent teachers present ideas clearly. (McCabe and Jenrette, 1995)*

-- *Excellent faculty are talented in clarifying difficult subject matter. (DuBois, 1993)*

An effective teaching assessment process should determine that the ideas and directions presented in a class are clear and understandable. Miscommunication, confusion, or failure to convey key information leaves students at a distinct disadvantage. Good communicators go beyond clear information delivery to create environments that encourage comfortable, two-way communication between students and teacher.

B. Effective teachers design learning environments that encourage time on task.

Simply because time is spent in a classroom chair does not mean that time is being spent learning the subject. Successful classrooms spend time on tasks that aid learning. An effective teacher uses what is known about how people learn to design productive learning time.

Reports state:

-- *Learning is enhanced when students invest as much time and high-quality effort as possible. (Angelo, 1993)*

-- *Good practice emphasizes time on task. (Chickering and Gamson, 1987)*

-- *Good teachers manage the learning environment so that maximum learning will result. They lead class discussions that stimulate learning and enhance the goals of the course. (Smith and Simpson, 1995)*

The assessment of effective teaching should be able to characterize the productiveness or lack of productiveness of a class period. There should be some way to determine how teaching and learning efforts are committed to the most important information.

C. Effective teachers engage students to actively use knowledge.

Learning is enhanced when students are engaged in active cognitive processes. Teachers need to design learning activities that require thoughtful information processing.

On this point, researchers say:

-- *Students are (cognitively) actively engaged in their academic work. (Angelo, 1993)*

-- *Good practice encourages active learning. (Chickering and Gamson, 1987)*

-- *Excellent faculty encourage student participation and see themselves as student-centered teachers. (DuBois, 1993)*

-- *Good teachers promote students' individual involvement through learner-centered teaching methods. (Smith and Simpson, 1995)*

-- *Excellent teachers encourage independent thinking, analytic listening. (McCabe and Jenrette, 1990)*

-- *Good new teachers lecture in a relaxed style that provides opportunities for students' comprehension and involvement. (Boice, 1991)*

Using course materials, an assessment program should be able to identify activities that involve students in active engagement with course material. Straightforward presentations of materials are not, in themselves, supportive of solid learning. Excellent teachers can describe specific ways in which their understanding of cognitive processes shapes the design of instructional activities to ensure that

students encounter the subject thoroughly. An assessment process should be able to discriminate among teachers at either end of this continuum.

D. Effective teachers use an appropriate array of methods.

Because of the semester has its own rhythms and because students' needs change, teachers must be prepared to alter instructional methods to suit immediate goals. Methods must also be varied to accommodate students' different learning styles or developmental levels. However, it is obviously the aptness of methods that is important to learning, not simply the presence of different teaching techniques.

Researchers report the following:

-- *Excellent teachers match varying teaching methods with specific instructional objectives. (Smith and Simpson, 1995).*

-- *Excellent teachers provide students with alternative ways of learning. (McCabe and Jenrette, 1990)*

-- *Good courses contain varied instructional methods. (CTL, 1997)*

-- *Students encounter a balance of intellectual challenge and academic social support. (Angelo, 1993)*

-- *Good teachers present material that is sequenced and paced appropriately for learners. (Smith and Simpson, 1995)*

Teaching assessment procedures should indicate the degree to which the teacher makes deliberate use of varied techniques to engage students. The mere fact that there are varied techniques is not as promising as deliberate use of variation. It is important that a teacher respond to student needs and to the changing focus of the curriculum. The review process should develop methods to identify and acknowledge teachers' success in adapting teaching methods to meet student needs.

E. Effective teachers encourage students to work together to learn.

Peers are one of the most powerful learning aids. Effective teachers structure activities that use peer relationships to assist in the learning enterprise.

Research studies indicate:

-- *Students work regularly and productively with other students. (Angelo, 1993)*

-- *Good practice encourages cooperation among students. (Chickering and Gamson, 1987)*

-- *Excellent teachers provide cooperative learning opportunities for students. (McCabe and Jenrette, 1990)*

-- *Good teachers encourage cooperation and collaboration among students. (Smith and Simpson, 1995)*

A complete teaching assessment program should thus be able to indicate how well a teacher creates conditions that enable students to work together productively, to improve their understanding of the material. A course should not be composed simply on teacher talk. Classroom activities that teach students how to work together effectively should yield high rates of learning success. Protocols for determining whether adequate levels of cooperation exist should be established within the assessment rubric.

F. Effective teachers give regular, helpful evaluations of learning.

To improve the quality of their work, students need continual, immediate, and helpful feedback. The teacher must incorporate an effective system for giving feedback to students, if they are to reach their potential.

The research states:

-- *In good courses, the quality of examinations is good. (Feldman, 1988)*

-- *Effective learning occurs when students are assessed and evaluated on what matters most (main points) and understand the criteria and standards against which they will be evaluated. (Angelo, 1993)*

-- *Students become aware of their own ways of learning, so they can better monitor and direct their energies and efforts. (Angelo, 1993)*

-- *Good practice gives prompt feedback. (Chickering and Gamson, 1987)*

-- *Good courses have timely, informative feedback/evaluations of academic work. (CTL, 1997)*

-- *Good teachers provide helpful feedback to students in a variety of ways. They construct valid and reliable tests and administer other evaluation measures fairly. (Smith and Simpson, 1995).*

-- *Excellent teachers evaluate their students frequently and always let them know where they stand with regard to academic performance. (DuBois, 1993)*

-- *Excellent teachers give constructive feedback promptly to students. They are fair in their evaluations. (McCabe and Jenrette, 1990)*

In order to assure that students have the information necessary to make progress in the subject matter, the teacher must have a thoughtful plan for assessing students' knowledge and abilities. In contrast to a generic letter grade, this evaluation system must provide specific information that both confirms knowledge gains and highlights the next steps for improvement. A teaching assessment system should be able to determine how well course evaluation methods contribute to enhancing the students' learning.

IV. Teaching Relationships

A special dimension of academic support integral to high student performance is the relationship between the teacher and the students. Teachers who can develop relationships that foster and encourage student engagement will enhance learning.

The researchers claim:

-- *Excellent teachers are open, have respect for opinions of others, and encourage questions and discussions. (Bernoff, 1992)*

-- *Excellent teachers never embarrassed or berated students (DuBois, 1993)*

-- *Excellent teachers create a climate that is conducive to learning. They treat individuals with respect. (McCabe and Jenrette, 1990)*

-- *Good new teachers have positive attitudes about students. (Boice, 1991)*

A. Effective teachers and students are enthusiastic.

Clearly, motivation is a vital source of energy in learning activities. The effective teacher is energetic and enthusiastic and finds ways to create student interest and commitment to the learning task.

Reports indicate that:

-- *The effective instructor shows an enthusiasm for the subject and for teaching. (Feldman, 1988).*

-- *In good courses students and teachers are enthusiastic about learning. (CTL, 1997)*

-- *Effective teachers have enthusiasm about/interest in the subject matter, they are dynamic, energetic, and stimulate interest. (Bernoff, 1992)*

-- *Excellent teachers exhibit enthusiasm about their discipline and class presentations. They are able to convey a strong sense of presence in the classroom to elicit students' attention and stimulate their emotions. (DuBois, 1993)*

-- *Good teachers enhance students' motivation through personal enthusiasm for the subject. (Smith and Simpson, 1995)*

-- *Excellent teachers are enthusiastic about their work. (McCabe and Jenrette, 1990)*

Classrooms with enthusiastic learners are not hyped-up circuses but places where dedicated, sincere efforts are being made to learn the subject. While strategies for creating this enthusiasm may vary, the degree to which a classroom generates this dedication should be evident and should be assessed as an important quality in promoting learning.

B. Effective teachers and students need to know and respect each other.

Students are unlikely to learn from people they do not know or respect. This does not mean that teachers are required to reveal their personal lives to students (or vice versa), but it does suggest that students learn best when they see how scholarship is connected to dimensions more personal than the mere repetition of content.

Researchers claim:

- *The relationships between students and teacher matter. (CTL, 1997)*
- *Learning is enhanced when students work regularly and productively with instructors. (Angelo, 1993)*
- *Good practice encourages student-faculty contact. (Chickering and Gamson, 1987)*
- *The instructor is available and helpful. (Feldman, 1988)*
- *Effective teachers are interested in, have concern and respect for students. (Bernoff, 1992)*
- *Excellent teachers have an approachable and friendly style with students (DuBois, 1993)*
- *Excellent teachers are responsive to students' needs. (McCabe and Jenrette, 1990)*

Teaching assessments should determine the degree to which a constructive relationship was established between students and teacher. At the very least, it is important that students feel welcomed to talk to the instructor. It is even better when students understand and respect the teacher because he or she models a commitment to scholarship (Smith and Simpson, 1995). Teachers' ability to connect with students constitutes a significant factor in learning success.

C. Effective teachers acknowledge and adjust to student differences.

Because students come from a variety of class, race, gender, ethnic and lifestyle backgrounds, because they manifest a variety of learning styles, and because they are often at various developmental learning stages, it is imperative that teachers be responsive to student differences.

Research demonstrates:

- *Good practice respects diverse talents and ways of learning. (Chickering and Gamson, 1987)*
- *Good teachers accommodate students' different learning styles by using a variety of teaching methods. They deal appropriately with issues that relate to various aspects of diversity. (Smith and Simpson, 1995).*
- *Excellent teachers respect diverse talents. They regard students as individuals operating in a broader perspective beyond the classroom. They provide perspectives that include a respect for diverse views. (McCabe and Jenrette, 1990)*
- *Excellent teachers understand [students' backgrounds]. (DuBois, 1993)*

The degree to which the classroom provides ready access to multiple world views in its material, activities, and relationships represents an important marker of students' (equal) opportunity to succeed. Teachers who address students' different needs for support are generally perceived as fair. Assessments of teaching should recognize teachers' efforts to assure that all students feel welcome and can be successful in learning the subject matter. The assessment should incorporate a rating of the degree to which they reach these goals.

D. Effective teachers are fair and impartial in dealings with students.

For students to succeed, they must trust that their efforts will be treated with the same respect as those of all other students. Perceived unfairness can destroy student interest and motivation.

The researchers state:

-- *The teacher is impartial when grading students. (Feldman, 1988)*

-- *The teacher shows overall fairness to students. (Feldman, 1988)*

-- *Effective teachers are fair. (Bernoff, 1992)*

The quality of fairness is also mentioned in McCabe and Jenrette (1990) and Smith and Simpson (1995) as cited in section III F (above).

Students' perception that the instructor treats all equally is fundamental to the integrity of a class. An assessment program must therefore collect data that indicates how fairly the teacher treats students, if it is to assure this dimension of effective teaching.

E. Effective teachers are open to receiving feedback and adjusting courses appropriately.

When there is a clear and open channel for communication, teachers and students can modify and adjust to circumstances that might otherwise obstruct learning. Without such channels, confusion and misunderstanding may lead students and teachers to work in a too restrictive environment.

The reports indicate:

-- *The teacher provides, receives, and makes use of regular, timely, specific feedback about course procedures (Angelo, 1993)*

-- *Two-way communication is evident in good courses. (CTL, 1997)*

-- *Excellent teachers give consideration to feedback from students and others. They listen attentively to what students say. (McCabe and Jenrette, 1990)*

-- *Good teachers develop a reflective approach to teaching by collecting feedback and using it to continually modify the approach to teaching. (Smith and Simpson, 1995)*

Therefore, teacher assessments should gauge how well teachers and students communicate on matters dealing with the classroom environment. The assessment process should be able to determine whether there are mechanisms in place to collect feedback and how well students and teachers use them to maximize learning.

V. Course Management

Obviously, logistical and administrative components of a course must be handled efficiently and effectively. Even though the research on college teaching and learning largely overlooks course management, the smooth functioning of a course is an important factor in creating an environment conducive to learning. Course management encompasses a range of issues such as: regular meetings with classes, timely assignment of tasks and return of feedback, etc. The way in which the classroom is organized as an environment determines how effectively it will support learning.

The reports do suggest:

-- Good teachers manage the process of planning, teaching, and evaluating in a timely manner. They deal appropriately with matters of discipline, academic honesty, and legal information. (Smith and Simpson, 1995)

Nearly all the researchers recognize the importance of being available to help students (McCabe and Jenrette, 1990; Bernoff, 1992; DuBois, 1993; Smith and Simpson, 1995).

VI. Professional Development

No single arrangement of teaching and learning components will be successful in all circumstances. Rather, good teaching requires that educators have a rich understanding of pedagogical theory and practice and are able to engage in the on-going development and adaptation of their teaching approach. Stephen Brookfield (1995) describes the importance of critical reflection to college teaching. Mary Ellen Weimer (1990) and Anthony Grasha (1996) have detailed the processes that help faculty improve their teaching practices. Moreover, Raoul Arreola (1995, pp. 78-79) has documented how ***faculty evaluation scores improve when they participate in faculty development initiatives***. Faculty members who hold themselves to high professional standards in their role as teacher exhibit qualities which attest to the dynamic nature of effective teaching.

Researchers claim:

-- Excellent teachers recognize and accept teaching as a fundamental and challenging dimension of scholarship. They use research in teaching as it applies to instruction in their field. They use a reflective process. (Smith and Simpson, 1995)

--Excellent teachers have a strong sense of commitment and dedication to college teaching. (DuBois, 1993)

-- Excellent teachers are committed to education as a profession. They display behavior consistent with professional ethics. They work collaboratively with

colleagues. They provide clear and substantial evidence that students have learned. (McCabe and Jenrette, 1990)

-- Good new teachers show evidence of actively seeking advice about teaching from a colleague. They demonstrate a great readiness to become involved in campus faculty development programs (Boice, 1991)

-- Excellent teachers have a distinct identity as a teacher, have been inspired by past teachers, and need their students as much as students need them. (DuBois, 1993)

It is reasonable to expect that faculty be able to document their scholarly efforts to enhance pedagogical knowledge and to develop practices that enrich their teaching and learning environments. Portfolios (Seldin, 1997) or other reports can be used to demonstrate such scholarly efforts in the area of good college teaching. An assessment program should incorporate some tool to encourage professional development, to measure progress, and to reflect areas for further growth.

Conclusion

Researchers argue that there are multiple components involved in effective college teaching. The major research has been summarized in six categories to better focus our efforts to collect and rate performance levels. Figure 1 presents the six categories and the components that make up each. These categories form one of the underlying structures from which a sufficiently complex evaluation system can emerge.

The Components of Effective College Teaching

I. Teacher's Content Expertise

- A. Effective teachers understand their academic field well.

II. Course Design

- A. Effective teachers have a clear purpose that organizes course elements.
- B. Effective teachers communicate high but realistic expectations.
- C. Effective teachers match the instruction to students' learning needs and interests.

III. Instructional Delivery

- A. Effective teachers use good communication skills.
- B. Effective teachers design learning environments that encourage time on task.
- C. Effective teachers engage students in actively utilizing knowledge.
- D. Effective teachers use an appropriate array of methods.
- E. Effective teachers encourage students to work together to learn.
- F. Effective teachers give regular, helpful evaluations of learning.

IV. Instructional Relationships

- A. Effective teachers and students are enthusiastic.
- B. Effective teachers and students need to know and respect each other.
- C. Effective teachers acknowledge and adjust to different students.
- D. Effective teachers are fair and impartial in dealings with students.
- E. Effective teachers are open to receiving feedback and adjusting courses appropriately.

V. Course Management

- A. Effective teachers organize instructional environments well.

VI. Professional Development

- A. Effective teachers hold high standards and engage in ongoing professional development.

Figure 1. Components of Effective Teaching

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