Response to Provost Rosowsky request 9/23/14
Evaluation of Teaching Performance

The College of Medicine has recently revised its administrative approach to the teaching mission, based on three mutually reinforcing pillars: 1) establishment of clear, nationally accepted standards for teaching, 2) resource allocation for teaching quantity and quality that align with those standards, and 3) creation of the Teaching Academy, which is a robust community of scholarly educators, to help faculty achieve and exceed the expected standards.

Clear standards for teaching, based on a national consensus, were established in 2010 as outlined in our faculty handbook standards and guidelines. Teaching falls into five domains of defined activity: direct teaching, curriculum development, advising and mentoring, educational leadership, and learner assessment. Achievement in each of these domains is measured by quantity, quality and evidence of scholarly approach (see Simpson, et al., Advancing Educators and Education: Defining the Components and Evidence of Educational Scholarship. Medical Education 2007:41(10): 1002-1009). In the College of Medicine, General Fund resources for teaching are allocated through a set of defined formulas and practices known as the Faculty Teaching and Research Reward System (FTARRS). FTARRS was revised by a college-wide committee and the revised system will be put in place in July of 2015. Each of the domains of teaching has explicitly been valued in FTARRS for quantity; the development of value measures for quality has been assigned to the Teaching Academy.

As you know, the Teaching Academy (TA) at the UVM COM is just in its first few months. This is a new institution that has been fully supported by the Dean of the College of Medicine, and has been funded by all the department chairs. The TA has recently received an endowment to fund a full time director. The goals for the Teaching Academy are to: 1) improve teaching throughout the college, 2) increase educational scholarship among those faculty, and 3) elevate education to the same level of academic rigor, status and recognition as research and patient care have been for many years. The bottom line is, as one of our students said at our retreat in December, “If we don’t make better teachers, the rest isn’t worthwhile.”

The current system for evaluating teaching will have to change based on the structural changes outlined above. Currently, individual teaching is only evaluated through standard online rubrics that provide scores in standard categories as well as space for formative comments. These data are forwarded to the faculty member, course director and department chair. We have planned a multi-pronged approach to improve this system, using the TA to develop a peer evaluation system and an enhanced student component, with data being accumulated for each faculty member in a personal teaching portfolio. The Teaching Academy will develop these quality measures using one or more rubrics for self- and peer evaluation of teaching. These measures will be used for formative feedback for faculty, for evidence of teaching quality in their teaching portfolios and potentially in the allocation of FTARRS funds. We plan this as a collaborative, but rigorous and robust process wherein faculty members work in teams as peer observers and coaches to continuously improve teaching in all areas. Participation in peer evaluation will be voluntary, but we expect that it will be supported by Chairs and Division Directors.

The College of Medicine has an integral role for students in teaching improvement beyond individual student evaluations. The Student Education Group (SEG) is comprised of elected
representatives from each of the four classes in the COM and they are charged with aiding in continuous quality improvement of medical teaching. This group provides continuous feedback through embedded members in each course and provides an annual quality report on each course in the curriculum. In the future, we plan to task the SEG to help us to enhance our individual teaching evaluation system. We will ask them to help us in developing a rubric for the students to use for faculty evaluation that will provide real time information to faculty members, so that they can use it to improve.

The TA is currently composed of eight members who gained entry through an arms-length, anonymous, external, peer-review process of their teaching portfolios. We are now in the process of receiving applications for membership from across the COM in the form of education portfolios. The portfolio applications are reviewed by TA members, as well as by members of Teaching Academies at other medical schools across the country. The portfolios are designed to articulate the faculty member’s accomplishments in direct teaching, mentoring/academic advising, curriculum/assessment, educational research, and leadership/administration. In each area, the portfolio details evidence of the faculty member’s accomplishments with respect to Quantity, Quality and Engagement – with narrative as well as data in each area. The portfolio can be found at the following link:
This format has been designed to assist faculty members to articulate their work in education clearly so that it can also be presented in an effective way in the promotion and tenure process. We have found as we work with this that many faculty members are also using the portfolio preparation process to self-assess their academic development in a much clearer and more rigorous way than they ever did before.

There are many other functions of the TA, including ongoing faculty development sessions throughout the COM. Our next retreat on March 26 and 27 will focus on mentorship. One of the clear goals of the TA is to facilitate all faculty members being involved in effective mentoring relationships. The attendees at the December retreat met others across all departments who are devoting significant time and effort to teaching. We anticipate that this will add to the effectiveness of our efforts at teaching improvement.

The College of Medicine is engaged in a process that will grow rapidly over the coming year to provide a rigorous and robust environment for teaching assessment and improvement that is diversified and collaborative. With a clear reward system (FTARRS) that is based in part on teaching quality, we are elevating the status of education and teaching in the college both for the students and for the faculty members’ own professional development.