Why and How to Evaluate Teaching

Why evaluate teaching?

- **Formative evaluation**: information that faculty can use to improve their teaching
  - Private and personal
  - Informal and ongoing
  - Rich feedback

- **Summative evaluation**: information used in personnel decisions
  - Hiring, promotion, tenure, teaching awards, identifying concerns in the classroom
  - Global and comparative
  - Shared with chairs, administrators, hiring committees
  - Conducted at specific intervals (e.g., pre-tenure)

Chism, 2007

Common types of teaching evaluations

- **Student feedback**
  - Student ratings and free response
  - Focus groups/exit interviews/surveys of graduating students
  - Alumni letters/surveys

- **Peer review**
  - Observations of in-class lectures and activities
  - Review of course materials (e.g., Blackboard site, syllabi, assignments, exams, rubrics, etc.)

- **Self-reflection** (e.g., teaching philosophies; narratives about changes in courses)

http://www.crlt.umich.edu/tstrategies/guidelines

Today’s Session

- Why and how to evaluate teaching
- Student ratings and comments
- Peer review of teaching
- Conclusions

Upcoming sessions

- **Principles of Course (Re)Design**
  - May 21 @ 9:30 am - 12:30 pm
- **Crafting Multiple Choice and Clicker Questions for Higher-Level Thinking**
  - May 22 @ 9:30 am - 11:30 am
Student Ratings

- Benefits
  - Already required by UVM
  - Quick, easy, affordable
  - Students are one of the best sources of information about day-to-day functioning in the class (e.g., faculty behavior)
  - One of the best ways to gain information about how students experience classes

Criticisms: Validity

- Association between student ratings and achievement on standardized exams moderate at best (.27; Uttl et al., 2017)
- Most recent meta-analysis that includes associations between student ratings and performance in future classes, controlling for prior knowledge, reports a correlation of 0 (Uttl et al., 2017)

Criticisms: Classroom Environment

- Evidence that grading leniency is related to higher instructor ratings (Griffin, 2004; Olivares, 2001).
- Faculty believe that increasing amount of material and standards in classes will result in lower student ratings (Birnbaum, 2000)

Criticisms: Biases

- Evidence of gender bias against women in student ratings, despite no differences in current or future student grades or hours spent studying
  - Particularly from male students
  - Particularly in relation to math content
  - Particularly for younger females (e.g., graduate students)
  - Bias present in ratings of course materials (e.g., textbook), despite use of the same materials across instructors (Mengel et al., 2018)

How to make student ratings useful

- Call them ratings, not evaluations
- Acknowledge and understand limitations
  - At most, small association with student achievement
  - Subject to bias
  - Difficult to use to compare across faculty and classes
  - Small differences in scores are unlikely to be meaningful

How to make student ratings useful

- Understand appropriate uses
  - Pay attention to student ratings that are very low
  - Identify student experiences that are important
  - Track within-faculty changes and patterns within a class (e.g., are there ratings than deviate from the rest?)
- Increased focus on qualitative feedback
  - Organize comments by category
- Collect other sources of information
Peer Review

- Benefits
  - Moves away from the sole reliance on student ratings
  - Peers well-positioned to judge appropriateness of course materials, assignments, etc.
  - Fosters a shared understanding of departmental teaching goals and values
  - Communicates the value the department places on teaching
  - Observers can improve their own teaching

Criticisms

- Take too much time
- Privacy and autonomy in the classroom
- Lack of reliability and validity of peer reviews (Chism, 2007)
- Biases in peer review

How to make peer review useful: Process

- Develop systematic process and documentation
  - Emphasize peer review broadly, rather than just classroom observations
  - Have reviewer meet/communicate with the observed faculty before and after the review
  - Understand limits of a single review
  - Provide materials to reviewers

How to make peer review useful: Materials

- Identify what constitutes “good teaching” in your discipline, and develop materials that reflect this
  - Combination of quantitative and qualitative feedback: can include narrative prompt forms, checklists, ratings forms
  - Consider whether your criteria reflect inclusive values
  - Develop a shared understanding among reviewers

How to make peer review useful: Choosing reviewers

- Choose reviewers carefully
  - Do not allow faculty to select their own reviewers
  - Faculty within versus outside of the department
  - Administrators versus more senior peers versus reciprocal peer review
  - Mentors versus evaluators
  - Appropriately compensate peer reviewers
Conclusions

Multiple sources of information
• Different methods capture unique aspects of teaching
• All methods have limitations, and many (if not all) are potentially subject to bias
• Problems with overreliance on single indicators
• Look for commonalities across sources

Investing limited resources
• Balancing structure and flexibility
• Prioritize introductory and core courses/sequences
• Consider if/how to evaluate non-lecture sessions

Greater focus on formative evaluations
• Helps faculty improve their teaching
• Greater opportunity to include constructive feedback
• Often occurs early enough to make improvements for the semester
• Formative evaluations help foster a sense of value and commitment to teaching
• Making teaching evaluation less intimidating (Massey et al., 1994)

Ways to encourage formative uses
• Collect feedback more regularly (does not need to be formal)
• Include targeted questions
• Integrate self-assessment with other methods
• Emphasize importance of making changes, when appropriate
• Consider benefits to more established (e.g., tenured) faculty

Potential things to try....
• Broaden sources of peer and student feedback
• Reciprocal peer review teams
• Peer review of new or redesigned courses
• Service committee responsible for peer reviews
• Promote formative evaluation

https://wp4.vanderbilt.edu/cft/guides-sub-pages/peer-review-of-teaching/
CTL Faculty Associates

- Nicole Phelps in HST
- Dianna (Annie) Murray-Close in PSYS
- Available for individual faculty consultations

THANK YOU!