

Evaluation of Teaching Performance
UVM Honors College
December 1, 2014

The Honors College is unique among the undergraduate colleges at UVM in that it does not have responsibility for instructional faculty in the context of RPT cases. Instead, we “borrow” faculty from the other seven undergraduate colleges to teach our First-Year and Sophomore Seminars (HCOL 085/086 and HCOL 185/186), and consequently rely heavily on the teaching evaluation data available from Chairs and Deans in the undergraduate colleges when we are considering faculty for our curricular needs. Those transactions alone, though, underscore the centrality of effective teaching to the mission of the Honors College. And so, while we do administer student evaluations at the conclusion of our courses that produce valuable summative data that is both qualitative and quantitative in nature, the primary model adopted by the Honors College in the area of teaching evaluation involves a **formative approach**. It is, in other words, the mission of the Honors College to provide its faculty with significant faculty development opportunities that are built centrally into our first-year and sophomore-year curriculum and that lead to the overall improvement of teaching.

We describe below the model we have developed (and continue to develop) for this formative approach to teaching evaluation:

The first-year courses are built around a collaborative teaching model that, in the fall (HCOL 085, The Pursuit of Knowledge), involves ten faculty members, each teaching one 20-student seminar from a common syllabus. The faculty meet every Monday morning during the semester for a regular faculty meeting. While the first part of each 75-minute meeting is taken up with issues involving students of concern, the majority of the meeting is spent discussing pedagogical practice, in terms both of strategies in the classroom and in the assignment and assessment of student work. The regular meetings during the fall semester are preceded by two or three meetings/workshops during the previous spring semester in which collaborative planning and preparation for the course figure highly. The nine or ten spring first-year seminars (HCOL 086, Ways of Knowing), although no longer sharing a common syllabus, nonetheless share common learning objectives, and thus the weekly faculty meetings remain a critical part of the pedagogical landscape.

Resource partners in this intensely collaborative environment of faculty development have included the staff at the Center for Teaching and Learning, instructional faculty at Bailey-Howe Library, the Director of the Writing in the Disciplines Program, and, more recently and quite prominently, the Director of First-Year Writing and Information Literacy.

For sophomore-year faculty, the weekly faculty meeting is replaced by at least one one-to-one meeting with the Honors College deans prior to the beginning of the

semester to discuss individually the general learning objectives for the HCOL 185/186 courses, and the specific learning objectives of the course proposed by the individual faculty member. Those discussions are supplemented with one or two general faculty discussions during the semester that focus on progress toward a (mainly) coherent set of learning outcomes.

Student feedback is critical to this model of a formatively-focused model of teaching evaluation not only because it provides the Honors College administration with some data that can aid in future staffing decisions, but, more importantly, because it offers up the learner's perspective on a highly considered set of pedagogical practices and, ideally, leads to the improvement of those practices. To this end, we administer a **mid-semester "survey"** (not a formal evaluation) in all our first-year and sophomore-year courses, as well as summative **end-of-semester course evaluations** (copies of the mid-semester survey questions as well as the end-of-semester course evaluations are attached). The mid-semester surveys often generate discussions directly with students regarding the quality of their experience in the course and enable faculty to make adjustments to their pedagogy while they are still engaged in the course.

An **end-of-semester teaching reflection**, in which each Honors College faculty member considers the strengths and weaknesses of the course they have just taught, has the dual purpose of providing the HCOL administration with valuable context for the student evaluations, and stimulating a reflective self-assessment by faculty when it is most valuable.