

Mid-Semester Review of Teaching

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Abstract

A mid-semester discussion between the department chairman and students in each class within his department is one effective and efficient means of evaluating faculty and improving teaching.

One of the major responsibilities of a department chairman is to evaluate his faculty for continuation of contract, tenure, promotion, and merit. This problem is compounded in colleges of agriculture since typically many faculty in such colleges have joint appointments in resident instruction, research (experiment station), and cooperative extension.

Of the three types of appointment, evaluation of research is perhaps the easiest. A department chairman has the opportunity to scrutinize the progress of research projects and note the quantity and quality of research projects and publications.¹ Evaluation of extension and resident instruction is much more difficult. In extension, the criteria for evaluation is vague. Evaluation of extension faculty may be partially based on their publication record.

As difficult is evaluation of resident instruction faculty. The department chairman seldom observes the teacher in the classroom and consequently relies heavily on student or peer evaluations. This paper describes a complementary procedure to these "usual" methods — specifically, mid-semester review of teaching.

"Usual" Methods of Evaluating

Perhaps the most popular evaluation utilizes a student evaluation form which the instructor administers toward the end of the term or semester. On such forms the student is asked to evaluate the instructor's teaching techniques as well as the content or subject matter of the course. Undoubtedly, such evaluation is useful to the instructor in pointing out faults either with technique or subject matter.² But this type of evaluation usually occurs at the end of the semester and has no direct benefit to the class filling out the evaluation. If problems are identified, there is no opportunity to remedy them for the class in question. The students filling out the evaluation simply play the role of good Samaritan in assisting students in future classes.

Another approach to resident instruction evaluation is classroom visitation by the department chairman. The frequency with which the department chairman may review a particular class varies with department and institution. Our guess is that frequency ranges from one to five times per semester.

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There are several objections to this method of reviewing. First, this method presupposes that the reviewer is qualified to judge resident instruction. But being a department chairman does not necessarily mean that the reviewer is a qualified teacher — much less a qualified judge of teaching. Second, if the reviewer visits a particular class for one or two lectures, he necessarily has a small sample — perhaps a sample of one. He may review the instructor on a good day or on a bad day and has no basis for judging whether the day was representative of performance. Further, if the review is announced to the instructor, the instructor may be so nervous as to do an exceptionally poor job. Third, if the reviewer attends several classes of a particular course, this tends to negate the "sample of one" objection. However, reviewing several classes of one course is a costly (time consuming) procedure. Even in a small department, attending a few classes of any one course involves a considerable amount of the reviewer's time. Last, the main objection to in-class reviews is that criteria used to evaluate teaching are not clear to the reviewer. The review may be ineffective since the reviewer may be using one set of criteria whereas the instructor may believe in an alternative set of criteria. It seems that only by chance will these two sets of criteria coincide.

Another method of teacher evaluation that is becoming increasingly popular is peer evaluation by several faculty. This procedure perhaps reduces some of the objections of department chairman review. There is at least an increased chance that one of the reviewers is qualified to evaluate instruction. The instructor may be less nervous standing before his peers than his supervisor. However, it is more costly if several peers are involved and faculty members may be reluctant critically to evaluate their colleagues.

A further objection to both peer and administrative evaluation is reflected by Foth (4). Different evaluators use a different base. Peers tend to make their evaluation on knowledge of subject matter and research activities. Administrators may evaluate the impact the teacher will have on the image of the school. Thus it is not unusual for a teacher to be evaluated differently by peers, by department chairmen, and by students.

Mid-Semester Review

An alternative technique is a mid-semester review of classes — each class, every semester, is reviewed at mid-semester by the department chairman. The sequence of events goes as follows. First, the department chairman in

1) We often dispose of this phase of a department chairman's responsibility too lightly. Certainly the number of publications is not a criteria of research competency. As Bertramson (2) suggests, suppose the department chairman were put in the position of a research journal editor to evaluate a publication. Would he find the job so easy?

2) Lawrence Aleamoni (1) has an interesting discussion of eight typical faculty concerns about the appropriateness of using student ratings to evaluate teaching effectiveness. In concluding, he counters with reversing the situation by posing the same eight concerns from the point of view of faculty evaluating students.

consultation with faculty prepares a specific list of criteria that he will use in evaluating a particular class (Table 1). This set of criteria is available to all instructors either when they are hired or when the criteria were put together.³ Second, at mid-semester, the department chairman arranges to meet with each class for the last fifteen or twenty minutes of the class period. During this time, the department chairman asks the instructor to leave and conducts the review procedure. The chairman reviews the criteria with the students, trying to involve many students in discussing the strengths and weaknesses of the course and the instructor.⁴ Third, after the review, the department chairman prepares a written statement for the instructor on the findings of the review and also has a face-to-face critique with the instructor.

This type of review has several advantages. First, the instructor and the reviewer know beforehand the criteria by which instruction is evaluated. Second, since the review accounts for the first half of the class, the reviewer has an opportunity to combine the observations of the class over the entire first half of the semester. This tends to overcome the "sample of one" criticism. Third, because the review occurs at mid-semester, the students who were respondents have an opportunity to benefit from the review. If there are problems such as distracting mannerisms of the instructor, physical distractions in the room, unclear assignments, the instructor has the opportunity to make corrections and improve the course for the students who offered the suggestions. Fourth, there is a relatively low cost associated with this review procedure. The reviewer spends approximately fifteen or twenty minutes with the class at mid-semester and some time in a written and a face-to-face critique. These times are much less than those associated with peer reviews of several lectures of each class.

Conclusions

The resident instruction review procedure described effectively circumvents many of the problems involved with conventional review procedures. While the authors believe that the mid-semester review procedure is an effective one, they also believe that it is just one procedure that complements other methods. Mid-semester reviews should provide one input into the evaluation of resident instruction. There is no reason to discontinue the end-of-

3) The questionnaire was designed to bring out student responses to those criteria that we believe make a good teacher. These criteria were derived from a student questionnaire administered at the end of the semester — the results of which are also reviewed by the department chairman. There is a plethora of articles that deal with teaching criteria. Some of the more recent easily found in the *NACTA Journal* are: Swanson (8), McVey (7), Gardner (5), and McComas (6).

4) Casavant (3) discusses the mechanism and benefits of a similar approach which he called Colleague Aided Evaluation (CAE). His procedure was a mid-semester visitation by a peer, designed primarily for self-improvement. Questions apparently were covered more informally and oriented toward problems the instructor felt he was having. He did, however, observe the same student reaction that we have noted at Nevada: students have been open in their discussions and have occasionally had disagreements.

semester student evaluations as well as in-depth classroom visitations. However, the latter because of their high cost need not be conducted every semester, but perhaps every year or two. By following all three methods, the department chairman is provided with a stronger base for evaluating resident instruction.

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Ag Manpower Expansion In Developing Countries

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The world food problem has focused worldwide interest on agricultural development. However, agricultural development is not only the basis for increased food production to solve the world food problem; it is the foundation upon which overall development of a country rests.

Agricultural development requires many inputs, among which are land resources, capital, and manpower. Given the land, capital, and other resources, it takes competent agricultural manpower to develop a plan; put the other resources together, and actually achieve increased agricultural production.

For the past 25 years or more, American universities have been a major resource throughout the world in the development of agricultural institutions designed to produce the manpower required for agricultural development. With the advent of new foreign technical aid pro-

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