UNIVERSITY SENATE
STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK AT ALBANY

PROPOSED STATEMENT OF POLICY ON THE EVALUATION OF TEACHING AT SUNY/ALBANY

SUBMITTED BY: Council on Educational Policy
December 5, 1983

IT IS HEREBY PROPOSED THAT:

I. The attached Statement of Policy on the Evaluation of Teaching at SUNY/Albany be approved.

II. That this bill be referred to the President for approval and implementation.

ATTACHMENT
BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE:

The improvement of teaching has been a campus concern for many years. The Senate's charge to the EPC states that "The Council shall have the responsibility for ensuring the review of the quality of teaching and developing standards for its evaluation." Since 1979, when President O'Leary and the EPC jointly appointed the Committee on the Improvement of Undergraduate Teaching, the improvement and evaluation of teaching has been a recurring EPC agenda item. One way to improve teaching is to improve its assessment. The Council therefore, has taken a number of steps to improve Student Ratings: first by recommending (in 1980) a set of items for departments to consider using; and second by approving (in 1981) a plan for the SIRF evaluation now used in all General Education courses.

Subsequently, in the spring of 1982, the council charged its Committee on Evaluation Policy with developing "a comprehensive policy statement concerning the evaluation of instruction on the Albany campus." The issues to be addressed by this statement included the purpose(s) of evaluation and whether the form and sources of evidence used in evaluations should be uniform across the campus. In the course of its deliberation, the committee discussed these issues with many members of the academic community.

The attached statement of policy was submitted by the committee in September 1983 and endorsed by the EPC at its October meeting. The policy statement stresses the centrality of peer review in the evaluation of teaching. In its introductory statement to the council, the committee reaffirmed that "Student opinion is both a unique and essential source of information..." But it also maintained that student opinion "should never stand by itself as 'the' evaluation of teaching." There are a number of guidelines on this campus regarding the collection and use of student opinion in the evaluation of teaching, but there is at present no comprehensive statement concerning the role of peer review. The EPC believes that the attached statement fills this gap and that its implementation will strengthen the process of the evaluation of instruction at SUNY Albany.
A STATEMENT OF POLICY ON THE EVALUATION OF TEACHING AT SUNY/ALBANY

I. Principles Underlying an Evaluation of Teaching

The issue of the evaluation of teaching derives from the question of teaching competence. An evaluation of teaching is a judgment concerning the degree of competence with which the function of teaching has been performed.

Teaching is not a homogeneous entity or operation. Within a university context, teaching is always specific to a particular subject matter or discipline. A judgment of teaching competence relates always to a particular subject matter or discipline.

In the university, it is an established principle to recognize that within the faculty resides the special competence needed to design the various programs of the curriculum, to make staffing decisions for courses, and to establish the standards by which student achievement is certified. Primary use of that same competence must be made in evaluating teaching. It is both the obligation and prerogative of the faculty (and chairs) that an effective peer review play the primary role in the evaluation of teaching in a university.

The enormous differences in the traditions and practice of disciplines as diverse as economics, music, English and physics may well be reflected in similarly diverse approaches to the evaluation of teaching in these disciplines. Even within a single academic discipline, teaching responsibilities in a university may run the gamut from large freshman survey and service courses through the supervision of small graduate research seminars to the direction of doctoral dissertations. Responsible evaluation of teaching recognizes both differences among disciplines and the diversity of efforts within, and approaches to, a discipline by individual faculty. Each department is expected to take the initiative in devising criteria and methods of evaluation appropriate to its discipline and to the spectrum of its responsibilities.

II. The Purpose of Evaluation

The purpose of instructional evaluation shall be:

1. to encourage continuing improvement in teaching; and
2. to provide an appropriate basis for the recognition of the quality of teaching in personnel decisions.

III. The Procedure of Evaluation

The procedure by which instruction is evaluated at SUNY/Albany shall ensure that the information obtained, its evaluation, and its use is generally agreed to be relevant, significant, valid and fairly applied.
IV. Peer Evaluation

A) Responsibility and Objective

The faculty of a department shall have responsibility for setting up a policy and procedures for the peer evaluation of the teaching abilities of departmental colleagues being considered for promotion or tenure. Those policies and procedures shall be made explicit in a statement to all faculty in the department and included in each tenure/promotion candidate's personnel folder.

A necessary condition of the peer review is that the department establish a credible and defensible method of evaluation of teaching. This evaluation should identify instruction which significantly exceeds or falls short of the expectations of the department in its various instructional responsibilities. In short, the departmental evaluation should provide both a judgment of the instructor's competence and an explanation of how that judgment was arrived at.

B. Examples of Questions Relevant to a Peer Review

No list of objectives could or should be of universal importance to the variety of disciplines represented in the university. Those questions of key relevance to a discipline will be created as part of departmental policy and procedures. We offer examples below only to illustrate the kinds of questions whose answers

i) bear strongly on the evaluation of teaching, and
ii) can be responsibly answered only by peers.

1. Is the level or challenge of the courses appropriate?
2. Is the coverage of those courses sufficiently comprehensive within the context of current practice within the discipline?
3. Is the material of the courses up-to-date and does it reflect an awareness of current issues within the discipline?
4. Is the scholarly content of the courses adequate?
5. Does the instructor's teaching reflect intellectual growth?
6. Does the instructor exhibit skill in the art of communication through presentations in seminars and colloquia?
7. To what extent does the instructor develop new courses or innovative approaches to teaching?
8. Do course assignments and examinations allow for an adequate evaluation of student performance?
9. Are the grading standards of the instructor reasonable?

10. Is the content of the courses appropriate and relevant to their role in the curriculum?

11. Is the instructor creative and effective in helping students develop independent research skills?

C) Examples of Information in Support of a Peer Review

Those materials deemed most important to an evaluation of teaching will be decided upon in the context of each department's procedures. For illustration, we list below examples of the great variety of information which is available, relevant to the evaluation of teaching, and generally non-intrusive in its collection.

1. course syllabi, goals, objectives
2. assignments, papers, problem sets, lab reports, projects
3. required textbooks
4. reading lists
5. examinations
6. student questionnaires
7. audio-visual materials
8. class handouts
9. class grade distribution
10. independent study projects
11. theses

D) Classroom Observation

We consider separately the issue of classroom observation since this is a highly controversial issue, though it is currently practiced in some departments. Classroom observation is neither encouraged nor discouraged as part of departmental procedures. Observation in the classroom is at the discretion of departmental faculty. Such decisions shall be made by the faculty at the departmental level. If a department chooses to employ classroom observation as a part of its peer evaluation, then it is suggested that:

1. classroom observation should be made only with the consent of the instructor being evaluated; an instructor may withhold consent without prejudice;

2. each instance of classroom observation should be made by more than one colleague; and

3. more than one observation over a semester should be made to ensure adequate representation.
V) **Student Evaluation**

The collection of student opinion shall be by systematic methods formulated or selected and administered at the department level, and this information shall serve as input to the peer evaluation.

A collection of data generated by student questionnaire and unsupported by peer evaluation shall not by itself be considered to have met the criterion of the evaluation of "effectiveness in teaching" as mandated by the Policies of the Board of Trustees. Nevertheless, the reactions of students to their instruction is recognized as an important, relevant, and distinct form of information in the overall evaluation of teaching.

The objective of student questionnaires should be to obtain information which is relevant to the evaluation of teaching and which students are in a unique position to provide – namely the students' own perceptions of the impact upon them of what goes on in the classroom. This might well include questions that attempt to explore both the affective and cognitive impact of instruction from a student perspective. Communication skills relevant to instruction and the flow of information in the classroom is another potential area in which student perception can be useful.

The results of questionnaires are usually summarized in numerical form. However, it is not raw numbers but rather a clear interpretation (by the department) of the meaning of those results which should be of prime concern. For example, the need for interpretation of student data is brought into focus by studies showing a statistically significant impact of subject matter, class size and course level upon student ratings of instructors. The research literature is also inconclusive on the relation between student ratings and objective measures of teaching effectiveness.

To interpret student data responsibly, the peer review should have available to it data from comparable courses taught by other faculty. Data on candidates for promotion and tenure should be current. It is reasonable to expect that every effort be made to obtain student responses on candidates in a variety of courses at different levels over a period of time. Efforts should be made to ensure that student data represent a comprehensive sampling of each class. Data transmitted in behalf of a candidate should identify the course, the enrollment and the percentage of students reporting.

It is the responsibility of the department to transmit a summary of the student response data with the personnel folder. The form of that summary should be left to the department. The summary should state the basis on which the peer review evaluated student response to the instructor. The Office of Institutional Research is prepared to offer technical assistance to departments in the development of methods for assessing students' opinions of teaching and in the analysis of data.
VI. Rights of the Instructor Under Review

Faculty members under peer review shall be given the opportunity to contribute information to that review. The purpose of this opportunity shall be to make explicit relevant information in such areas as curriculum development and innovation, teaching methods and techniques, student advisement and instructional goals to aid a responsible and fully informed peer evaluation.

Faculty members shall also have the opportunity to address any issues they feel are raised by the documentation arising from either student input or the general peer evaluation and shall retain the right to have this information included with the documentation of their case.
December 6, 1983

MEMORANDUM

TO: President O'Leary
FROM: Fred Volkwein
RE: Bill No. 8384-07

Since the Senate has now passed the Policy on Evaluation of Teaching as recommended by EPC, we need to discuss steps toward implementation. Topics to discuss include (a) the extent to which the policy should be interpreted to apply to all faculty candidates for merit increases and excellence awards in addition to promotion and tenure cases; and (b) the need to subsequently address teaching improvement as well as evaluation. I suggest the following steps:

1. Meet with Judy (including perhaps Harry Hamilton and Frank Lees) for the purpose of discussing an overall strategy.
2. Refer (a) above to APG for comment and review.
3. Refer (b) above to EPC and its Committee on Evaluation Policy.

Fred Volkwein
MEMORANDUM

TO: President O'Leary

FROM: Ronald A. Bosco, Chair

RE: Bills approved at 12/5/83 Senate Meeting

At its December 5, 1983 meeting, the Senate approved the bills listed below.

In accordance with our procedures I am forwarding these bills to you for your approval. Bill No. 8384-10* does not require your approval but is attached for your information.

✓ Bill No. 8384-07 Proposed Statement of Policy on the Evaluation of Teaching at SUNY/Albany
✓ Bill No. 8384-08 Proposed Combined B.A./M.S. Program in Psychology and Rehabilitation Counseling
✓ Bill No. 8384-09 Proposed Combined B.A./M.S. Program in Psychology and Counseling
✓ *Bill No. 8384-10 Proposed Revision of Charges to Senate Councils
✓ Bill No. 8384-11 Policy for Allocation of Campus Royalties from Patents and Licenses

Attachments
MEMORANDUM

TO: Francine Frank, Chair  
   Council on Educational Policy

FROM: Ronald A. Bosco, Chair  
      University Senate

SUBJ: Peer Evaluation

February 1, 1984

One of the purposes expressed in support of the peer evaluation bill passed recently in the University Senate is that peer evaluation would help improve the quality of teaching at SUNYA. Questions were raised about this claim both in the Senate Executive Committee and on the Senate floor while the bill was being discussed, with many observing that there were no specific provisions in the bill to assure that an improvement of teaching would necessarily follow implementation of the bill.

In light of this apparent discrepancy between an expressed purpose of the bill and the practical results of its implementation, I hereby charge EPC to consider and prepare for Senate action a statement about the ways in which peer evaluation will (or may) improve the quality of teaching at SUNYA. This statement, which should offer models for the improvement of teaching through peer evaluation, would be most effective if drafted in light of consultation between the Council and the Office of Academic Affairs and those departments and schools on campus which, in earlier EPC research on peer evaluation, were identified as using peer evaluation as a means to improve the quality of teaching.

cc: Vice President Ramaley  
    Fred Volkwein
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Fred Volkwein
MEMORANDUM

TO: Ronald A. Bosco, Chair
University Senate

SUBJ: Bill No. 8384-07 Policy on Evaluation of Teaching

February 8, 1984

In response to your memorandum of December 13, 1983, I am pleased to indicate my approval of the Senate recommendation on Bill No. 8384-07 Proposed Statement of Policy on Evaluation of Teaching.

In order to implement this bill I have asked the Vice President for Academic Affairs to formulate an additional action memorandum. This memorandum of implementation will be transmitted to all deans and department chairs.

Vincent O'Leary

cc: Vice President Ramaley
Francine Frank
MEMORANDUM

TO: Francine Frank, Chair
Council on Educational Policy

FROM: Ronald A. Bosco, Chair
University Senate

SUBJ: Peer Evaluation

February 1, 1984

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