



University Senate
Faculty and Personnel Affairs Committee (FPAC)

Charge A-1709 - Proposal to Improve Evaluation of Teaching at Rutgers

December 2017

A. Charge

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| Charge A-1709 | Proposal to Improve Evaluation of Teaching at Rutgers: Review the Proposal on a Program to Improve How Rutgers Evaluates Teaching as well as input received from the Senate's Instruction, Curricula and Advising Committee (ICAC, Charge A-1709, response due to Executive Committee by October 24, 2017), and make appropriate recommendations. Respond to Senate Executive Committee by November 20, 2017. [Issued September 2017] |
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B. Background

In September 2017 the Executive Committee issued the charge A-1709 Proposal to Improve Evaluation of Teaching at Rutgers to ICAC and FPAC. In September 2017 the administration forward the document "A Proposal to Improve the Evaluation of Teaching at Rutgers University." In 2016-2017 FPAC had studied the issue of student teaching evaluations and had prepared input for the ICAC report on Charge S-1511: Personnel Consideration Related to Student Evaluations, and Best Practices in Evaluation of Teaching in April 2017. In November 2017 FPAC reviewed the input provided by ICAC. In November 2017 input from the Newark and New Brunswick Faculty councils was received and included in the report. The proposal was reviewed by the committee at the September, October and November meetings of FPAC and ICAC's input was reviewed at the November meeting.

This report provides an overview of the work done by FPAC and includes the input provided by ICAC and the Faculty Council of New Brunswick and Newark campuses.

C. FPAC results

The proposal replaces the current system of teaching evaluation that has been based on the use of Question 9 and 10 of the Student Instruction Rating Survey (SIRS) administered by CTAAR (except for the Rutgers Law School, and two schools in RBHS, Pharmacy and Nursing that use their own method) with an evaluation system that includes a modified version of SIRS with two new standard questions, peer evaluations and the use of a teaching portfolio. In the proposed teaching evaluation system SIRS Questions 9 and 10 will be removed from the system and replaced with two new questions. The new SIRS survey will be developed with formative questions that will provide student feedback in how to improve the course .The proposal include two new yes/no dichotomous questions which would be used as summative evaluation of teaching effectiveness.

The Faculty and Personnel Affairs Committee (FPAC) agrees with the Instruction, Curricula and Advising Committee (ICA) concurrence with the Task Force statement that “the current methods for evaluating teaching, for many schools and departments, rely too heavily on the Student Instructional Ratings Survey (SIRS) to the exclusion of peer evaluation of course materials, classroom observation, or other methods of assessing teaching.” FPAC has recommends that questions from the Student Instructional Ratings Survey (SIRS) be removed from the personnel forms and not to be used in personnel decisions.

The committee has recommended in its April 2017 response to charge Charge S-1511: “Personnel Consideration Related to Student Evaluations, and Best Practices in Evaluation of Teaching” that SIRS question be removed from personnel evaluation forms and be discontinued as means to evaluate teaching by Rutgers instructors. During the 2016-2017 review of this charge the committee reviewed the use of the SIRS survey questions for personnel consideration, the evidence on student evaluations as a tool to evaluate teaching performance, and the potential for bias in student instruction rating surveys based on gender, race, and other characteristics of instructors. FPAC made the recommendation that teaching evaluation should be based on peer evaluation of teaching. Teaching evaluations that are used as input for the promotion and tenure process and for renewals of all tenure-track, non-tenure track, contingent, and part-time lecturer faculty should be based on peer evaluation. The committee also recommended that teaching evaluations should be coupled with professional development. The committee has reviewed Charge A-1708 Proposal to Improve Evaluation of Teaching at Rutgers and again recommends that the university discontinue the use of the SIRS instrument for issues related to personnel evaluation of teaching effectiveness.

Proposed to Improve Evaluation of Teaching at Rutgers

The proposal by the Task Force provides the following new system of Evaluation of Teaching at Rutgers.

The proposal applies to all individuals who teach Rutgers students: tenured and tenure track faculty, non-tenure track faculty, part-time lecturers, and teaching assistants. (This creates one procedure for teaching evaluation where currently there are more than one teaching evaluation procedure at Rutgers.)

The proposal will provide two forms of evaluation of teaching: summative and formative. Summative evaluation has been defined as retrospective and is reviewed as part of a personnel decision (reappointment, promotion, or tenure). Formative evaluation is prospective and is designed to help faculty improve teaching.

The proposal indicates that summative evaluation would be based on a summative survey which is referred to as SIRS or some alteration of SIRS that will be made available through CTAAR or an equivalent office. The proposal recommends that SIRS be revised to include two standard questions to be used University wide and it seems that these will replace the SIRS question 9 and 10 that are used as a summative evaluation by Rutgers currently. The two questions are:

Q1: Did the instructor contribute to your learning? Yes, No

Q2: Did the course content contribute to your learning? Yes, No.

Summative (personnel) evaluation will also be based on “the multiple methods for evaluating

teaching when developing the departmental narrative for faculty being evaluated for reappointment, promotion, and/or tenure”

Peer Review is mentioned as a method to review teaching and it seems that it may be one of the “multiple methods” for evaluation of teaching for personnel decisions.

Teaching Portfolios are also part of the proposal. The proposal leaves the use of the teaching portfolio as a method for evaluation of teaching to deans and departments to decide.

Frequency of review of instructors – the proposal provides more than one frequency for review.

“Tenure track faculty must receive a comprehensive evaluation each time a candidate is considered for reappointment, tenure, promotion, or post-tenure review”

“Tenured faculty should receive a full teaching evaluation at least every three years”

“Full-time NTT faculty should receive a full teaching evaluation at least every three years”

“SIRS results should be reviewed for every course or section taught by a PTL or teaching assistant”

“Every course taught by nontenured faculty, including teaching assistants and part-time lecturers, will be evaluated every semester.”

“Departments will propose an evaluation timetable for tenured faculty, which must be approved by the Dean and Chancellor.”

The FPAC found that the proposal contains inconsistencies in the frequency of review of instructors, to have the potential of generating excessive and unnecessary evaluations for some TAs and PTLs with several years of teaching experience at Rutgers, and to be unclear in the differentiation of summative and formative evaluation of teaching.

The ICAC report, Newark Faculty Council and New Brunswick Faculty Council reports also contain reviews of the “Proposal to Improve Evaluation of Teaching at Rutgers” that indicate inconsistencies in the proposal.

Current system for evaluation of teaching at Rutgers

FPAC has found during the review of the “Proposal to Improve Evaluation of Teaching at Rutgers” and during the review of Charge S-1511 that the current system of evaluation of teaching at Rutgers relies on the use of the Student Instruction Rating Survey which FPAC has found does not evaluate teaching. Instead the Student Instruction Rating Survey allows students to rate the popularity of the instructor and of the course. The response to Charge S-1511 issued by FPAC and ICAC go into detail regarding the current system for evaluating teaching at Rutgers.

The SIRS is currently used for both formative and summative evaluation of teaching. There are eight standard formative questions and two standard summative questions. Not all departments use the SIRS survey but the promotion and reappointment forms for tenure track and NTT faculty include the two standard summative questions.

Concerns related to “Proposal to Improve Evaluation of Teaching at Rutgers”

During the decision of the proposal the following concerns were raised by FPAC

Will PTLs be compensated for preparing the teaching portfolio or will this be added to the existing workload?

PTLs, non-tenure track, and teaching assistants will be evaluated for every course while tenured faculty will be evaluated every 3 years. There seems to be inconsistencies in the review period in the proposal.

Concerns were expressed about PTLs evaluated for every course when this evaluation is merely to retain their position and not for promotion.

How will peer evaluations be conducted? Will there be training for peer evaluations?

Will poor student survey results lead to a review?

How will faculty be involved at the departmental and school level in the development of the teaching evaluation process?

There were objections raised to the use of the two new questions and regarding “learning” use of a dichotomous response (yes/no) instead of a Likert scale.

Will faculty members have the right to respond to the evaluation?

Review of input from ICAC and Newark and New Brunswick Faculty Councils

ICAC provided input into the development of this report and this report was discussed at the November 2017 FPAC meeting.

ICAC recommended the following:

1. Departments establish specific criteria for peer in-class observation as well as training programs for peer reviewers.
2. CTAAR, or some other appropriate group, develop a basic template for teaching portfolios that could then be modified based on disciplinary/departmental differences.
3. If it is determined that PTLs must, as recommended in the Task Force report, also submit teaching portfolios, a separate basic template for PTLs be developed.
4. Rather than two “standard” questions, a meaningful core of four or five questions be developed as the basic Standard Instructional Rating Survey (SIRS). Student input should be included as part of the development process.
5. Instructors and departments should be regularly reminded that they have the option to add questions that might be particularly relevant for that course or that department to the survey.
6. When additional questions meant to be formative in nature are added to the basic SIRS, they cannot be included in Form 1-a as part of the promotion/tenure process except at the faculty member’s request.
7. In order to allow for student input, departments should include relevant student comments from the SIRS, or other sources as appropriate, in the teaching section of Form 1-a and related forms.
8. To increase completion rates and make the results more meaningful, schools and units should have instructors give students time in class to complete the SIRS on their own mobile devices.

The Newark Faculty Council's main recommendation was to have each school and department develop a teaching evaluation document similar to the Law School that would begin with a statement what the school views as good teaching, identifies the different types of courses the school/department teaches, and for each course indicates the desired elements. The document should include all metrics the department expects to use to evaluate teaching what each metric measures and the metric's strengths and weaknesses

The New Brunswick Faculty Council made the following statement:

“Summative Evaluations of the proposal:

SIRS: It should not be used in summative evaluations for rehiring, retention, or promotion; if used for formative evaluation, it needs to be corrected for its many biases.

PEER OBSERVATION: If done adequately—training faculty, developing a systematic set of questions and areas to examine--peer observations are useful for formative evaluations; they are not appropriate for summative evaluations.

TEACHING PORTFOLIO: A good way to see into a teacher's work is to see a portfolio—e.g., teaching philosophy statement, syllabi, assignments, student work with comments, etc. Evaluating the portfolio would require a flexible set of criteria, and training of the evaluators.

IMPLEMENTATION: The timetable for the proposal is too rapid—there need to be intermediate stages to allow development of instruments and methods of evaluation and evaluative criteria.”

Results of FPAC's review

The FPAC found the following key points for consideration regarding the “Proposal to Improve Evaluation of Teaching at Rutgers”

There are inconsistencies in the frequency of evaluation of teaching effectiveness between teaching assistants, part-time lecturers, non-tenure track faculty, tenure track faculty, and tenured faculty. There should be consistency in these evaluations, and evaluations related to continued employment should be distinguished from evaluation for promotion and tenure.

Peer evaluation has been previously recommended by FPAC and the Senate as a means for teaching evaluation. The current proposal does not provide enough detail concerning how and when peer evaluation will be conducted.

Teaching portfolios will be an addition to the evaluation of teaching process. Teaching portfolios requirements for PTLs and TAs needs further explanation. Will TAs and PTLs be compensated for the time it takes to prepare teaching portfolios?

The SIRS was designed and intended for student use and information and not for the formal evaluation of faculty teaching effectiveness. The ratings of instructors by students generally lack any clear measure of validity. Student ratings of faculty may subtly push faculty to decide that positive student ratings can be attained if they do not push to maximize student learning, thus generating a higher probability of continued employment. The replacement of the questions with the two new questions does not appear to address the inherent problems with the use of this instrument.

D. Resolution

Whereas, the Faculty and Personnel Affairs Committee (FPAC) has examined the Charge A-1709 regard the “Proposal to Improve Evaluation of Teaching at Rutgers” and review the input received from the Senate's Instruction, Curricula and Advising Committee (ICAC, Charge A-1709); and

Whereas, the FPAC recognizes that the proposed process for periodic teaching evaluations of faculty is both desired and effective in building an effective faculty; and

Whereas, student feedback may be helpful to faculty and administrators and students in certain ways, the results of this feedback may not reflect a key mission of the University to promote student learning. It may, in fact, undermine that goal.

Therefore, Be It Resolved, that the University Senate recommends that:

1. Peer evaluation should be used for evaluation of teaching for the promotion and tenure process and for renewals of all tenure-track, non-tenure track, contingent, and part-time lecturer faculty.
2. Teaching evaluations should be coupled with professional development.
3. Instructors have the right to respond through a formal procedure to the evaluation of their teaching
4. The personnel forms be revised to remove the use of SIRS survey questions 9 and 10 and that the proposed two standard questions under the “Proposal to Improve Evaluation of Teaching at Rutgers” not be added.
5. End the use of SIRS survey questions 9 and 10 for personnel decisions for part time lecturer and all other contingent faculty, lecturers, or instructors employed by Rutgers University.
6. Departments establish specific criteria for peer in-class observation as well as training programs for peer reviewers.
7. CTAAR, or some other appropriate group, develop a basic template for teaching portfolios that could then be modified based on disciplinary/departmental differences.
8. If it is determined that PTLs must, as recommended in the Task Force report, also submit teaching portfolios, a separate basic template for PTLs be developed.
9. Rather than two “standard” questions, a meaningful core of four or five questions be developed as the basic Standard Instructional Rating Survey (SIRS). Student input should be included only as part of the development process and should not be used for personnel decisions.
10. Instructors and departments should be regularly reminded that they have the option to: i) add questions that might be particularly relevant for that course or that department to the survey; and ii) utilize amid-semester course assessment.
11. To increase completion rates and make the results more meaningful, schools and units should have instructors give students time in class to complete the SIRS on their own mobile devices.

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