

## PEER REVIEW

### Rationale:

The primary goal of peer review is improved teaching. It should represent one of several ways by which we share ideas and constructive suggestions, including also periods of orientation (already in place), group discussions among people teaching sections of the same course, seminars conducted by our best teachers, investigation of the kinds of help available from the Academy of Teaching Excellence, and review and refinement of student evaluation forms. The secondary goal is to document the quality of the teaching we do, for various uses beneficial to the individual and to the department.

### Method:

Since, along with student evaluations, peer reviews represent the principal documentation we have about the quality of the teaching we do, reviews should include more than simply observations about what went on in a class session or two. The reviewer should visit at least one week of consecutive class sessions; look at syllabi, assignments, and examinations; look at some graded papers; note innovative or especially effective teaching methods; and look at student evaluations from past terms, including any written student comments gathered and retained by the person being reviewed. The reviewer should talk with the instructor about the course in detail and understand both the instructor's aims and the methods used to achieve these aims. We should acknowledge and tolerate diversity of philosophies, aims, and methods (lecture, discussion, workshops, collaborative learning, conferences). The reviewer should also be aware of such activities as advising, developing new courses, teaching a broad range of courses, serving on curriculum committees, publishing articles or delivering conference papers which make a contribution to pedagogy. In other words, the reviewer should be aware not only of classroom performance but also of whether the instructor plans carefully, evaluates reasonably, and demonstrates interest in the improvement of teaching and curriculum within the department, the institution, and the profession. Reviews should recognize teaching strengths and provide practical, concrete suggestions about any areas needing improvement.

Great care should be taken in assigning reviewers in order to promote collegial relationships, and persons being reviewed will be allowed to veto suggested reviewers. If possible, the Chair or Associate Chair should talk with the person to be reviewed about her/his teaching aims and methods before assigning a reviewer. If the person being reviewed so chooses, he/she may submit a list of 5-10 suggested reviewers from which the Chair or Associate Chair may choose. In all cases, the matter of who the reviewer will be must be settled before contacting the reviewer. The reviewer and the

person being reviewed should mutually agree on which class sessions will be visited. A reviewer's report should be shared and discussed in its rough draft stage with the person being reviewed; and a copy of the finished report should be given to the subject at the same time it is submitted to the Chair or Associate Chair. The person being reviewed may file a response to the review and may request additional evaluation by someone else.

### **Practical uses:**

For all faculty, annual statements prepared by the department chair (which, individually or cumulatively, have much to do with salary adjustments, retention, promotion, and other kinds of reward) can be strengthened if recent peer reviews of teaching are on file. This is crucial to those faculty members assigned largely or entirely to teaching duties. Occasional student evaluations, stated numerically, are important but are an imperfect basis for confident or convincing statements about the quality of teaching. Instructors especially may find it useful to have peer reviews on file for use in applications or recommendations for positions elsewhere. Also, the regular availability of written student comments could provide an additional basis for annual statements. In addition, the department might want to debate at some point the usefulness of conducting interviews with its graduating majors and of "downstreaming," i.e., contacting students a few years after graduation.

For untenured assistant professors, peer reviews can provide evidence for reappointment in contract reviews and are crucial for inclusion in the tenure-promotion dossier.

For tenured associate professors, a documented record of quality teaching since tenure should be presented as part of the dossier recommending promotion to full professor. At least two reviews, including one recent one, should be presented.

It is highly desirable that candidates for Certificates of Teaching Excellence or for membership in the Academy of Teaching Excellence have a full and consistent record of peer review.

### **Procedures:**

**Instructors:** During the first year of appointment, instructors will be visited and given informal assistance by their mentors. Formal peer review will be conducted in the second, third, and fifth years of service. Even though peer review is not mandated after the fifth year of service, it is recommended that all faculty request review every third year.

Tenure-track Assistant Professors: During the first year of appointment, these individuals will be visited and given informal assistance by their mentors. Formal peer review will normally be conducted in the second, third, and fifth years of the probationary appointment. Given the desirability of having a substantial record of peer review for the tenure dossier, probationary faculty would be unwise to decline review.

Tenured Faculty: Even though review of teaching for tenured faculty is not mandated, it is recommended that all faculty request review every third year. Each fall the department Chair will invite tenured members of the professoriate to indicate whether they wish to be reviewed during the current year and remind those who have not been reviewed for three years that a review would be desirable and useful.

Appointment and eligibility of reviewers: status of informal, unsolicited reviews: etc.

The department chair will appoint reviewers for members of the professoriate, and the associate chair will appoint reviewers for instructors. Fulls will be reviewed by fulls, associates by fulls or senior associates, assistants by fulls or associates, and instructors by fulls, associates, assistants, or senior instructors. Although we encourage a maximum of informal visiting, discussion, and mutual criticism, and although unsolicited statements may contain valuable information and may be admitted to the file, we will distinguish between such statements and those resulting from the formal "peer review" assignments.

Thank you.