

Committee on Teaching and Academic Programs (CTAP)
AY16-17 Executive Summary of the Final Report
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Members Contributing to This Report

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Preamble

- Teaching and learning in higher education is increasingly complex and diverse in the range of students served, contexts and platforms of teaching, and range of tools utilized.
- The current system of course evaluation is primarily a measure of *student satisfaction* and is subject to a range of well-established biases. It is not a valid measure of instructor teaching effectiveness.
- The diversity of disciplines across USC necessitates diverse approaches to evaluating teaching quality. Each discipline should define what constitutes teaching excellence.

Guiding Principles

- Ensure educational value of a USC education by promoting excellence in teaching by ALL USC faculty.
- Provide a multidimensional system of evaluating teaching quality to be on par with the rigorous standards used to evaluate research at USC.
- Foster a culture of and commitment to excellence in teaching by defining what constitutes teaching excellence across the university.
- Provide recommendations for a common set of guiding principles and practices to be adapted and operationalized within each unit according to the particularities of each discipline.

Four Domains of Recommendations

- A. Promoting a culture of excellence in teaching
- B. Revising the existing course evaluation system
- C. Instituting a system of peer review of teaching practices
- D. Developing a teaching portfolio

DOMAIN A: PROMOTING A CULTURE OF EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING

We offer the following cadre of recommendations for promoting and reinforcing a culture of excellence in teaching as the primary desired goal of evaluating instructional practices.

Recommendation 1: Articulate components and levels of what constitutes teaching quality

Any revisions to the course evaluation system should be framed within a broader conceptualization and articulation of what constitutes teaching excellence as well as minimal standards of competency, both at the university and school levels. This, in turn, should be located within a strategic plan that articulates and implements USC's brand as an R-1 institution that values excellence in research *and* teaching. The strategic plan should be formulated by each school in a similar manner as the diversity plan.

Recommendation 2: Make connections to the diversity plan

Each school should assess the degree to which faculty are aligning their instruction and course materials to the mission of the school, including its values around diversity and inclusion. The university should also provide methods for schools to assess whether faculty, particularly women or faculty of color, are being negatively impacted by bias in their course evaluations.

Recommendation 3: Incentivize professional development to promote teaching excellence

In order for faculty development to occur, time and resources must be provided that support it. A range of options and incentives should be provided to faculty to engage in professional development around improving their instructional practices and have it be recognized in the APR.

Recommendation 4: Conduct systematic evaluation of the revised course evaluation

The process for developing and implementing a new/revised course evaluation system should be purposeful and systematic, bringing together resident experts on the topic and building on the body of research and psychometric principles that are referenced in this report. A comprehensive system of evaluation of the new/revised course evaluation system should be articulated from the outset with the implementation plan.

Recommendation 5: Use CET as the platform for implementing recommendations

USC's Center for Excellence in Teaching (CET) should be the driving force behind the pursuit of excellence in teaching by all schools, faculty, and future faculty at USC. It should fund and support innovative pedagogical initiatives that connect all of the varied resources USC has at its disposal. It should advise on teaching policy, including valid assessments of teaching practice that are both developmental and evaluative, and are embedded in the criteria used to determine merit, promotion, and tenure.

DOMAIN B: REVISING THE EXISTING COURSE EVALUATION SYSTEM

The current course evaluation instrument is flawed in its design, implementation, and use. We make the following recommendations for its improvement.

Recommendation 6: Articulate specific domains in the quantitative survey portion of the course evaluation with multiple items with subscale scores.

The current course evaluation survey should be revised to include assessment on multiple dimensions related to instruction with subscale scores for each. Such dimensions should include: a) instructional design, b) instructor characteristics, c) learning experiences, d) assessments and feedback, e) diversity and inclusion practices. Additionally, a student self-assessment item should be added to ask students to reflect on their responsibility and contributions to their own learning experience. This will foster a mutually supportive learning community of faculty and students who are committed to excellence in teaching at USC.

Recommendation 7: Utilize entire course evaluation and not just select items

The limitations of the existing course evaluation system is exacerbated by incomplete use of available data. In many cases, schools are utilizing only items 11 and/or 12 of the quantitative survey as a single overall numeric indicator instructor's teaching effectiveness. In keeping with principles of psychometric theory, an overall scale score should be calculated and used that is a composite score of all the items with breakdown of subscale scores by different dimensions of the course evaluation for a better understanding of factors that comprise the overall course evaluation.

Recommendation 8: Increase response rates

The importance of increasing the response rate of course evaluations cannot be emphasized enough. Any improvements to the instrument used to evaluate courses and/or teaching is only as good as the extent to which it is utilized effectively. Strategies to increase response rates include: a) having students complete the course evaluation at the beginning of class, b) educate/remind students of the value and importance of course evaluations and their responsibility to contribute to the overall quality of USC as a learning community, c) have the release of course grades be contingent upon the completion of the course evaluation as is the case in many other institutions.

Recommendation 9: Add student outcome data

If we wish to improve upon and institute a multidimensional approach to evaluating our instructional practices, then an assessment of student learning in relation to the learning outcomes needs to be added. Range of possible indicators tied to desired student learning include: a) project samples as part of student portfolios and performance, b) pre/post learning outcomes (if applicable) that demonstrate student gains in learning in relation to baseline data.

DOMAIN C: PEER REVIEW OF TEACHING PRACTICES

Given that peer review is the primary mechanism of quality control within the academy, we suggest that a systematic peer review process be applied to evaluating excellence in teaching practices. A peer review system should be framed within a professional development and peer mentoring model that emphasizes faculty member's ongoing commitment to their own learning. This will foster a mutually supportive learning community of faculty and their commitment to excellence in teaching.

Recommendation 10: Institute a system of peer *observation* of teaching system for the purpose of *formative* evaluation to improve quality of teaching

Assuming that the primary goal of evaluating teaching practices is to improve the quality of teaching, we recommend a two-part staged system of using peer review. The first stage is to use peer observation of classroom instructional practices to provide *feedback* as part of a formative process of evaluation. Voluntary participation in peer observation could be used as evidence of investment in professional development in teaching in annual merit review. Sample guidelines and rubric are provided from existing practices within USC.

Recommendation 11: Institute a system of peer *evaluation* of teaching for the purpose of *summative* evaluation at key points of faculty performance review (such as promotion)

As part of a multifaceted evaluation of excellence in teaching, we recommend that a peer evaluation of classroom instructional practices be added as part of a summative evaluation to be used primarily at key points in faculty performance evaluation such as promotion points for both RTPC and tenure-line faculty. The possibility and feasibility of using peer evaluations as part of the annual performance evaluations on a biennial or triennial basis should also be explored within each unit.

Recommendation 12: Incorporate peer review of instructional *design* as part of both the formative and summative evaluation identified above

In addition to peer review of the performative aspects of instructional delivery in the classroom, we recommend a peer review of key aspects of instructional design such as syllabus, course assessments, sample student feedback, and possible instructional material for the flipped classroom, to name a few.

DOMAIN D: DEVELOPING A TEACHING PORTFOLIO

A sustained and systematic approach to improving the quality of teaching necessitates a portfolio system as part of a professional development plan for each USC faculty member.

Recommendation 13: Develop a teaching portfolio system

We recommend that each faculty create a teaching portfolio to complement student course evaluations as well as peer observation and evaluation of teaching. A menu of options for a teaching portfolio include: a) statement of teaching philosophy, b) sample syllabi of representative courses, c) representative instructional plans with supplemental materials, and d) representative assignment prompts with grading rubric, e) sample work by students to the above assignment prompt with feedback from the instructor, f) self-reflection of teaching practices over time with artifacts to show development of teaching practices, and g) additional options appropriate to each discipline and standards.