

Complete Policy Title:
**Procedures for the Assessment of
Teaching**

Policy Number (if applicable):
SPS B1

Approved by:
**Senate
Board of Governors**

Date of Most Recent Approval:
**December 14, 2011
December 15, 2011**

Date of Original Approval(s):
November 10, 1993

Supersedes/Amends Policy dated:
April 8, 2009 (SPS 10)

Responsible Executive:
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I Effective Teaching

Effective teaching is a condition for promotion through the professorial ranks, the granting of tenure or permanence, salary increments based on merit, and University teaching awards (the President's Awards). These processes allow opportunities for the improvement of teaching through formal and informal feedback. Such feedback is particularly important for faculty at the beginning of their teaching careers, where it can and should provide a useful contribution to the development of teaching skills.

The general expectations regarding teaching effectiveness and illustrations of how this can be evaluated are contained in Section III, clauses 4 to 10 of the *Policy and Regulations with Respect to Academic Appointment, Tenure and Promotion* (Tenure and Promotion Policy). Procedures for such assessments are described below. In general, they involve two components: assessment by students and assessment by peers. The process of peer assessment is a cooperative one, involving the faculty member and the Department Chair and possibly other departmental colleagues and/or external assessors.

II Procedures for Student Evaluations of Teaching

It is the responsibility of the Dean of each Faculty to ensure that these procedures are followed.

1. Student evaluation by questionnaire shall be performed for every undergraduate course (including summer courses), toward the end of the course, every time the course is offered. Students should be informed at the beginning of each course that they will be expected to participate in these evaluations.
2. Each Faculty shall develop a standard, Faculty-wide student evaluation questionnaire that shall include as the first question a single summative question common to all university courses. The summative question is: *“Overall for this course, what is your opinion of the effectiveness of the instructor?”* This questionnaire may be customized for the needs of individual instructors and/or departments. At a minimum, the rating of the summative question, with departmental context, must be included in all tenure/permanence and promotion recommendations as part of the Departmental Teaching Evaluation Report (see SPS B8).
3. It should be made clear to the students that the instructor is not involved in the administration or the analysis of student questionnaires.
 - (a) Paper questionnaires should be distributed and collected during class time by someone other than the instructor. The instructor shall not be present during this procedure. Completed questionnaires should be returned by someone other than the instructor to the departmental office.
 - (b) Questionnaires may be administered on-line. On-line questionnaires must be made available to students only during the last two weeks of classes before the commencement of the final examination period and before final course grades are known.
4. Information from the student evaluation questionnaires will be consolidated by the Department or Senate-approved Program¹ into a report, consisting of a tabulation of the numerical data. Departments will provide all instructors with contextual data (averages and medians, ideally a histogram) for all the courses given in each term. This report will be used by the department as input for promotion, tenure, permanence, and/or salary reviews, and a copy will be given to the instructor after the final grades have been submitted.

¹ “Program” means a Senate-approved, interdisciplinary course of study at the undergraduate or graduate level which is not the sole administrative and academic responsibility of any one Department.

III Procedures for Departmental Evaluation of Teaching

Sound evaluation of teaching mandates evaluation by multiple people, on multiple occasions and in multiple contexts. The product of the evaluation process will not be a uniform document, rather teaching is complex and the product of evaluation of teaching may also be complex. Faculty members use a variety of pedagogies and work with students in multiple settings with multiple aids. For this reason, departmental evaluation cannot take the form of a single classroom visit, or an opinion expressed by a single individual after review of a single component of teaching, for research has shown that this method of evaluating teaching is unreliable. Instead, departmental evaluation must adhere to the principles of involving more than one evaluator and more than one site or occasion of evaluation.

A teaching portfolio structured in accordance with SPS B2 or SPS B3 would allow peers to evaluate the appropriateness of the individual's teaching approach, effectiveness of his or her teaching practice, the robustness of the evidence adduced in support of the instructor's effectiveness, and the importance of the individual's teaching contributions. It will also facilitate yearly annual review and discussion of teaching between the Department Chair and each faculty member, as well as the departmental evaluation that is part of tenure, promotion and/or permanence processes.

Conversational interviews about the contents of the portfolio between the instructor and the peer evaluators offer a good practice for evaluation, since they prepare the ground for informed and nuanced assessments of the instructor's teaching. A sound practice would be the review of the teaching portfolio by several colleagues. Colleagues may be experienced individuals who are members of the department or of other departments in the University.

To the extent that the students' ratings feature in the consideration by departments, or in the portfolios prepared for tenure and promotion or permanence, it is critical that these numerical ratings be set in the context of all the teaching done by the department. At a minimum this context should include the averages and medians of the scores for the summative question(s) for all courses, with distinction as appropriate, e.g., by level. It may be appropriate to weight the results for different courses by the number of responses.

It is expected that candidates for re-appointment, permanence, tenure or promotion will have an appropriate review of their teaching portfolios at the department level and that the department will construct a departmental report, incorporating the elements of the teaching portfolio that capture the substance of activities.

IV Departmental Teaching Evaluation Report

The department's submission on the evaluation of teaching for reappointment, tenure, permanence and/or promotion, which forms part of the dossier outlined in SPS B8, is not limited in length and should minimally contain commentary with respect to all of the following elements that are relevant:

1. annual review, and results of subsequent discussion with the candidate, of the Executive Summary (Part A) of the teaching portfolio (see SPS B2). Results of this discussion will be recorded in writing and agreed to by both parties.
2. observations from peers' visits to lectures or other teaching situations and evidence that the observations have been discussed with the colleague.
3. significant contributions to the curriculum. For example, this may take the form of well considered, evidence-based development in one's own course or across the curriculum or evidence of innovative teaching practice.
4. significant contributions to the development of course materials.
5. significant participation in pedagogical discussions with students, colleagues, TAs, in the department or elsewhere.
6. evidence of incorporation of some form of formative evaluation in courses and evidence of response to the concerns of students.
7. information on the common summative question on the student evaluation questionnaire should be provided in tabular form, including for each course, the number of students registered, the response rate, along with the mean, median and standard deviation. These numerical ratings should be set in the context of all the teaching done in the department and should, at a minimum, include the means and medians (better a histogram) of the scores for the summative question for all courses with possible distinctions by level as appropriate. Evaluation information should cover all courses taught during the previous five years of service at McMaster University.