

Peer Evaluation of Classroom Teaching

General Philosophy

Evaluation of classroom teaching in the Department of Agricultural Economics at Texas A&M University has both a development component (improving teaching ability) as well as an evaluation objective. The Department is committed to providing the highest quality teaching possible and an evaluation process enables the achievement of that objective. There is much interest among educators in using outcome assessment to measure teaching effectiveness. However, the difficulties in reliable measurement of learning is not sophisticated to the extent of using this approach at this time nor is it likely in the near future. Continuing research in outcome assessment may provide other mechanisms to evaluate teaching in the future.

The teaching evaluation process used in the Department of Agricultural Economics has two components: student course evaluations and peer evaluation. The major use of the evaluation system by the Department's administration is to provide the highest quality teaching possible. The results of the evaluations are used for tenure decisions, merit raises, and staffing decisions for specific courses. Feedback from the evaluation system to individual faculty will improve the overall teaching capability of the Department.

Student Course Evaluations

There are some inherent problems in using student course evaluations. However, when used with other supporting evaluation procedures, they are an important and useful source of information about the effectiveness of teaching faculty. The student course evaluations used by the Department of Agricultural Economics consists of 16 closed ended questions rated on a five point scale. The 16 standard questions used across all courses in the department include 5 questions recommended by Student Senate. Individual instructors have the choice to include up to four additional questions (in addition to the standard 16) selected from a question bank provided, or developed by themselves. The student course evaluations also include open ended questions to solicit student discussion of teaching effectiveness and areas for improvement. The results of the student course evaluations are summarized and made available to Department's administration.

Peer Teaching Evaluations

Peer teaching evaluation is an effective way to solicit the reactions of colleagues to the teaching effectiveness of individual faculty. Peer evaluation in the Department of Agricultural Economics is done at three levels:

- (1) Course Design Analysis,**
- (2) Self Evaluation, and**
- (3) Classroom Observation Analysis.**

Course Design Analysis is completed by the peer teaching evaluation team (defined below) using information supplied by the instructor that shows the mechanics of teaching the course. Information used would include: course syllabus, homeworks, exams, assignments, text selection, reading lists etc. The evaluation team would examine teaching objectives, scope and scale of the course and appropriateness of homeworks, exams etc. Some courses would require the use of professionals from other departments (e.g. Economics) or even other universities due

to the highly technical or sophisticated content of advanced graduate courses.

Self Evaluation by the instructor would identify strengths, weaknesses and any particular situations that may have effected the course during the semester from their perspective. The instructor would also be encouraged to provide information to the evaluation team about the course including: specific teaching or student evaluation techniques used, assignments given, testing procedures etc. This would give the instructor the opportunity to comment on circumstances for learning experiences, assignments, exams, etc., that might appear unusual to the review team.

Classroom Observation Analysis is in-class observation of the teaching of the instructor. Guidelines are provided below. Instructors will have the choice of having their classroom teaching physically observed (in the classroom) or they can submit a video tape for the evaluation process. If the instructor chooses to use a video tape the procedure will be as follows. The undergraduate office will provide a student worker to videotape a classroom presentation. The specific class to be videotaped is chosen by the faculty member giving the undergraduate office at least five (5) working days notice. The instructor will then be allowed to view the tape and decide whether or not this represents his/her best abilities. The instructor can chose to retake the video tape up to three times but only one tape will be submitted. This method allows the instructor to be sure that his/her best effort is represented on the tape. The instructor is encouraged to seek input from other faculty members on developing the best class session but the faculty responsibility for evaluating the teaching performance for that academic year will not preview this tape.

Peer Evaluation Team Composition

The criteria specified below will be evaluated by team of three consisting of a member of the departmental administration team plus two colleagues chosen by the department head. This peer evaluation team will complete all evaluations for an academic year. Evaluation of highly specialized subject matter courses (typically PhD courses) should make use of professionals with expertise in the area. (In the case of highly specialized courses this might require sending the syllabus, reading list and exams to those with expertise in this area at other institutions).

Time Frame

Faculty teaching both Fall and Spring semester (and summer in selected cases) will only be evaluated once. Generally, assistant professors will be evaluated once every year, Associate professors every other year, while full professors will be evaluated every three years.