



Education
Advisory
Board

Academic Affairs Forum

Standardizing Teaching Requirements

Promotion and Tenure Dossiers for Research Universities



Custom Research Brief

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1) Executive Overview

Key Observations

Promotion and tenure committees measure contributions such as course loads and course material produced, and measure effectiveness with student and peer evaluations of the applicant faculty member's teaching. Where committees measure teaching with replicable methods (e.g., surveys), committees refer to classes' grade point averages on an ad hoc basis to adjust scores and account for such factors' influence on student-given evaluations. Because teaching evaluations measure students' or peers' subjective impressions of classroom dynamics, the weights given to each component of a teaching evaluation are not standardized. Committees at all contact institutions combine these elements to develop a holistic impression of a faculty member's teaching impact.

Students rate the quality of the instructors and the quality of the course in multiple-choice paper surveys distributed at the conclusion of the course. Committees consider student responses to post-course surveys using grade point averages to adjust scores. Adjustments to student evaluations using data such as grade point averages seldom follow a standard formula across departments or individual faculty members. Committees instead apply these influencing factors to their judgments of an applicant faculty member's overall teaching effectiveness. Students' surveys could become more effective for committees if the questionnaires include narrative descriptions of the scores students give to faculty.

Committees for promotion and tenure compare applicant faculty members' average teaching assessment scores against other faculty in the department, and others at the same rank. Students rate teaching success using two key qualitative questions; the overall quality of the course and the overall quality of the instructor. The provost at **University C** includes these questions as a part of the institution's core student evaluation used by its colleges, but allows faculty members to include other questions more specific to the faculty member or course.

Qualitative metrics enter dossiers in peer evaluations and self-evaluative philosophical teaching narratives, but these metrics typically provide secondary insight to quantitative evaluation tools such as student surveys, students' grades, and course loads. Deans select peer evaluators with a history of quality teaching who are typically higher ranked than the faculty member under review. These peers provide insight into the applicant faculty member's course materials, curriculum, and teaching strengths and weaknesses. Committees incorporate these qualitative elements of a faculty member's dossier to develop a comprehensive view of their teaching capabilities.

Measurement processes do not change substantially between promotions from assistant to associate and associate to full professorship. Provosts establish standards for the importance of teaching elements and reject consideration of a faculty member for promotion until he or she has improved sufficiently. An average rating below 3 of a possible 5 points at **University B** designates a clear case for rejecting promotions on the basis of poor teaching. Committees and provosts enforce standards for high quality teaching more rigorously for the second promotion to full professorship than the first to associate professorship.

2) Standard Components of Teaching Assessments

Dossier Components and Weight

Teaching Components Comprise Less than Half the Weight of Original Research

While administrators at all contact institutions maintain a stated requirement of high teaching quality, teaching evaluations rarely, if ever, overshadow the research elements of a faculty member's promotion and tenure dossier. Administrators at **University D** estimate that approximately 30 percent of an assistant professor's evaluation for promotion to associate rank reflects his or her teaching ability. The proportion of this evaluation increases to 40 percent for faculty moving from the rank of associate to full professorship. Administrators at **University C** assign teaching quality a weight of at least 40 percent in promotion and tenure considerations.

While specific content of dossiers varies by department and college, evaluations of teaching quality at research institutions may include:

- **Self-reported factual information** such as courses taught and the class sizes of those courses, graduate students advised, and notable accomplishments (e.g., teaching awards, textbook authorship)
- **Student evaluations** including surveys, which committees analyze to determine the faculty member's standing among like-ranked faculty, as well as any changes over time
- **Peer assessments** by tenured faculty with histories of effective teaching evaluations
- **Self-assessment** and teaching philosophy, usually several pages in length, to describe pedagogical methods

Teaching Evaluation Requirements at Contact Institutions

Institution	Self-Evaluation	Peer Assessment	Student Surveys	Student Interviews	Required Course Load
University A	✓		✓		
University B	✓	✓	✓	✓	
University C	✓	✓	✓		✓
University D	✓	✓	✓	✓	

State regulations at **University C** mandate at least 18 teaching credit hours per year.

Sources: Interviews, Institutional Web sites

Committees at **University A** also factor in the importance of the class to a student's advancement within the department or in a course of study to incorporate the student's motivation. For instance, high evaluation marks for teaching a core course in chemistry earn more significant recognition from promotion and tenure committees than do high marks in an elective.

Colleges' Evaluation Mechanisms Differ to Account for Teaching Styles and Standards

Deans establish guidelines for faculty teaching evaluations with minimal input from central administration, and maintain a decentralized decision-making process to implement changes to evaluations of teaching components. Department chairs typically develop teaching assessments for their programs. Contacts suggest that because the methods used to teach courses such as humanities differ dramatically from methods used in sciences, homogenous evaluation metrics limit the usefulness of teaching. Guidelines for teaching evaluations at **University B** warn that entirely uniform systems of evaluation discriminate against some faculty members, and suggest that teaching evaluations should reflect sensitivity to individuals' teaching accomplishments and styles.¹



Committees Evaluate Progress to Ensure Equity

“A uniform system discriminates against some individuals, so a plan sensitive to individual variation should be developed. A faculty member should provide information about his/her contributions and accomplishments as a teacher on a longitudinal basis over his/her teaching career.”

-University B Guidelines for Evaluating Teaching

Course evaluation forms at **University C** include a common set of questions that faculty modify with additional questions. The common set of questions gives evaluation committees a point of data that measures faculty effectiveness consistently.

No Formal Weight Guidelines Dictate Teaching Evaluations

Promotion and tenure committees seldom ascribe weights to the teaching components of a faculty member's dossier. Variances in the weight given to evaluative metrics of teaching components do not typically follow formal guidelines. Committees draw from course survey data and other observations to create a contextualized understanding of a faculty member's teaching abilities.

Peer Evaluations ***Experienced Faculty Review Peers to Ensure Quality of Feedback***

Deans recruit faculty with experience in the department or discipline taught by the applicant faculty member to conduct peer reviews. However, departments at **University A** do not conduct peer reviews and contacts there caution that such reviews could create conflicts of interest by introducing peer evaluators' own biases. Other contact institutions assign peer evaluations to faculty members with long histories in the department, and whose ranks typically differ from the applicant faculty, to counter any potential for bias and to create consistent value for peer evaluations.

¹Center for Research on Teaching and Learning, “Guidelines for Evaluating Teaching.”

Administrators at **University B** require faculty members who complete peer evaluations to attend multiple courses and multiple sections, as well as review course materials to better understand the applicant faculty member's teaching process. Contacts caution that peer review is most effective to inform teaching improvement, but do not incorporate peer reviews into faculty promotion and tenure dossiers. Administrators recommend that deans develop standardized observation criteria to minimize the observing faculty member's potential to bias the results. Deans may institute anonymous peer review of faculty curricula and course materials to minimize the time required to conduct instructional reviews, and to further limit potential for bias.



Peer Review of Case Method Instructors at *University D*

While most faculty members are not required to include peer evaluations in their dossiers, faculty teaching courses in law and business at **University D** must include peer reviews. Faculty in those disciplines teach the case method, which emphasizes both the instruction of facts as well as the examination and application process. Administrators regard quality of case method as sufficiently important to the reputation of the institution to justify allocations of experienced faculty to review teaching performance.

Student Evaluations



Student scores

4/5 average

The average faculty score on two key student evaluation questions at **University C** is approximately 4 out of 5 possible.

Committees Evaluate Trajectory of Teaching Evaluations over Time

Faculty members bring between three and five years' worth of student evaluation data to promotions and tenure committees. Committees measure the average scores of a faculty member against those of other faculty members in the department, and plot the changes over time using simple tables or graphs.

- Overall, what was the quality of this course?
- Overall, what was the quality of this instructor?

Because faculty members compile the results from all courses taught, most results of other questions only inform immediate teaching improvements. For instance, a common question might ask for student input on an area of the course that could have benefited from additional curricular time or alternative methodology. Committees examine anomalies in the data, looking for courses in which instructors' scores fall outside the ranges of other faculty members in the department.

Committees Reference Grades to Account for Students' Rating Disparities

Promotion and advancement committees expect students who receive lower grades to rate their professors lower than those who receive high grades. To account for the "difficulty" of the grader, committees commonly list the grade point average for the class with the ratings faculty members receive in post-course student evaluations.

Student Evaluation Questionnaires Result in Unsatisfying Insights

Committee analyses of student evaluation data focus on the mean score attributed to faculty, especially for the key standardized questions that ask about the overall quality of the instructor and the course. Narrative descriptions of faculty teaching behaviors allow promotion and tenure committees to examine preferred teaching practices against actual performance, changing the teaching evaluation standard from an intangible concept of “excellence” to a specific rubric of teaching expectations. Students also standardize their judgments of faculty performance to the same criteria, rather than apply their own subjective ideas of a faculty member’s performance.

Post-Course Evaluation Questionnaires

“When you’re comparing means across faculty members, you’re really just comparing very tiny differences because students don’t assign a lot of difference between giving a faculty member a 4 or a 5. I’m not sure we should either.”

-Forum Interview

Selections from Course Survey at University C

	Disagree Strongly	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Agree Strongly
▪ The course was well organized	1	2	3	4	5
▪ The instructor communicated well	1	2	3	4	5
	Very Poor	Poor	Satisfactory	Good	Excellent
▪ Overall, this instructor was	1	2	3	4	5
▪ Overall, this course was	1	2	3	4	5

Course Instructor Survey Reworked to Include Narrative Guidance

1. What best describes the organization of this course?

- 5 The course curriculum moved smoothly from topic to topic, providing a base of knowledge to examine increasingly complex concepts.
- 4 Course segments adequately communicated the concepts I expected to learn
- 3 Some elements were taught too late in the course to be useful
- 2 Important elements of the course were missing or lacked sufficiently clear explanations
- 1 The course lacked coherence entirely and seemed to be based on the instructor’s whims

2. Overall, what best describes the instructor in this course?

- 5 The instructor was engaged with the students and the material, and available for office-hours conversations
- 4 The instructor was competent and knowledgeable, but with limited availability
- 3 The instructor was clear and professional, but unavailable for questions or follow-up
- 2 The instructor was difficult to understand or follow, even with repeated questioning
- 1 The instructor left most classroom teaching and student interaction to graduate students

3. Overall, this course was...

- 5 The best course I have ever taken
- 4 The best course I took this semester
- 3 The second best course I took this semester
- 2 A middling course this semester
- 1 Among the worst courses I took this semester

Student Interviews Provide Students' Perspective, but Suffer from Administrative Costs

The promotion and tenure review committee at **University B** conducts interviews with randomly selected students of varied grade-point averages to provide fuller context to the student perspective. In visual and performing arts courses, instructors solicit students to write letters on their behalf.

“One thing that remains largely undocumented or under-documented is the effect that faculty members have on individual students.”

-Forum Interview

Student evaluation forms at other contact institutions often include open-ended questions and responses, and applicant faculty may select only positive reviews to bring to the committee. However, the high volume of responses to analyze prevents committee members from incorporating student comments into all applicant faculty dossiers. Individual students' responses help faculty members improve their own teaching. Responses from students provide insight into a faculty member's strengths and weaknesses without overwhelming his or her capacity to analyze the information.

Self-Assessment

Self-Assessments Provide Reflection and Methodology Justification

All contact institutions include faculty members' self-assessments of their teaching philosophy and methods. Faculty members describe the way they structure curricula, lectures, and coursework, with a reasoned explanation for those decisions. Contacts at **University D** suggest that promotion and tenure committees prompt for responses to institutional pedagogical priorities; for instance, committees should ask faculty members how they incorporate technology into the teaching and learning environment.

Elements of Self-Evaluation at *University B*



The **background** of the faculty member:

- The dossier should contain statements that describe the faculty member's approach to teaching philosophy, strategies, and objectives
- Faculty members establish goals and discuss the strategies they have pursued to accomplish them



The **environment** in which the faculty member works:

- The applicant faculty member should describe his or her workload, and how workload factors have influenced his or her teaching and research
- The faculty member includes class sizes, courses taught, and other teaching-related responsibilities or accomplishments (e.g., club advisory)



Elements of the faculty member's **teaching process**:

- Selections of course materials such as syllabi, assignments, or recordings of classroom teaching
- Examples of student work, exams, and presentations
- A narrative describing changes to curricula, innovations or experimentation in curricula, or other reflections on teaching and learning

Faculty Report Teaching Improvement Strategies in Self-Evaluations

Promotion and tenure committees expect that faculty with low initial ratings (i.e., average score of less than 3.75 of a possible 5 points at the **University B**) in students' assessments of overall teaching or course quality will seek additional resources to improve their teaching methods. All contact institutions include resource centers that house pedagogy and communication experts, as well as survey and assessment forms.

Applicant faculty report efforts to improve their teaching methods in self-assessments, citing workshops and training sessions attended. The self-assessment affords faculty space to provide the committee with a narrative explanation of the steps he or she takes to improve.

Staff at **University D** who teach corporate speaking and presentation seminars teach

sessions to faculty to improve their communication skills. Contacts report that faculty value such sessions as opportunities to learn from experts at no cost.

Teaching Resources at Contact Institutions

- **University A**
Center for Educational Resources
- **University B**
Center for Research on Learning and Teaching
- **University C**
Center for Teaching and Learning
- **University D**
Center for Teaching Excellence

3) Research Methodology

Project Challenge

Leadership at a member institution approached the Forum with the following questions:

- What metrics do promotion and tenure committees use to measure teaching?
- How do administrators' expectations differ between faculty seeking promotions from assistant to associate professorship and those that seek full professor rank?
- What measures of peer evaluation do contact institutions require? How do departments facilitate these evaluations?
- How are student evaluations incorporated into promotion and tenure dossiers? What questions do students answer? What indicates success for a faculty member?
- Who evaluates a faculty member's self-assessment? What elements of self-assessment do promotion and tenure committees incorporate into their full evaluation?
- Are faculty teaching evaluations standardized across colleges or schools? Among departments?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of standardized teaching goals?
- What process did administrators undergo to standardize their measurements for teaching and evaluation? What challenges did they face?
- What weight do promotion and tenure committees place on teaching evaluations?
- Do all colleges follow all metrics of standardization, or do institutions permit some variance? How do institutions establish acceptable variance parameters?
- How do administrators ensure that peer and student evaluations reflect accurate judgments of faculty teaching abilities? What factors limit accuracy?

Project Sources

The Forum consulted the following sources for this report:

- Advisory Board's internal and online research libraries (<http://eab.com>)
- National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (<http://nces.ed.gov/>)
- Institution Web sites

Research Parameters

The Forum interviewed administrators responsible for faculty promotion and tenure evaluations at large research universities.

A Guide to Institutions Profiled in this Brief

Institution	Type	Location	Approximate Institutional Enrollment (Undergraduate/Total)	Classification
University A	Private	Mid-Atlantic	5,800/21,000	Research Universities (very high research activity)
University B	Public	Midwest	27,400/42,700	Research Universities (very high research activity)
University C	Public	South	38,400/51,100	Research Universities (very high research activity)
University D	Public	Mid-Atlantic	15,800/24,300	Research Universities (very high research activity)