

FINAL REPORT  
OF THE 1981-82 COMMITTEE FOR THE EVALUATION OF TEACHING EFFECTIVENESS AT  
SUNY CORTLAND

TO

SUNY CORTLAND COLLEGE FACULTY SENATE

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## OVERVIEW OF THE REPORT

The Committee worked diligently over the past year and a half to meet the Senate's charge. The Committee interviewed the President, Vice-President, Division Deans, and department representatives to determine the current procedures used to document teaching effectiveness. After extensive reading, meetings with a consultant, and lengthy discussion, the Committee developed a set of principles which served as the basis for its recommendation of a comprehensive teaching evaluation system.

The report is divided into three sections. Part One carries the charge of the Faculty Senate, reviews the President's, Vice-President's, and Deans' perceptions of the current procedures, summarizes the current procedures used to document teaching effectiveness, and ends with a committee statement on current practice. Part Two contains a statement on the value of CTE's in evaluating teaching effectiveness and the general principles which guided the Committee in formulating its recommendations. Part Three contains the committee's recommendations for developing and implementing a comprehensive teacher evaluation system. A bibliography of selected readings is attached.

### PART ONE

#### Charge of the Faculty Senate

The Faculty Senate charge to the Committee:

". . . The task of establishing college-wide guidelines for documenting the quality of teaching at Cortland. The Committee should be instructed explicitly to address how teaching effectiveness might be best documented for personnel decisions, and the Committee should present its final report at the first meeting of the Faculty Senate in the fall of 1981. Specific Committee tasks should include:

- a. Soliciting the views of academic deans, Vice-President Corey and President Clark concerning the strengths and weaknesses of our present system of evaluation.
- b. Determining, on a department by department basis, what evidence is now collected to document teaching effectiveness at the College.
- c. Determining the proper role and measurement of student course-teacher ratings in our assessment of teaching effectiveness." (Memo to Committee members by Donna K. Anderson, February 11, 1981).

#### Views of the Deans, Vice-President and President

The Committee interviewed Deans Reynolds and Dunifon, Vice-President Corey and President Clark during May and June, 1981 to determine their views of the present teaching evaluation process and their perceptions of the various components that could be part of an improved teaching evaluation system.

Since they believe teaching is the top priority at SUNY Cortland, they agreed that a better college-wide teaching evaluation system would have all faculty participate on a regular basis, and one component of it should be a Student CTE Questionnaire form. They agreed that at present there is no systematic approach to evaluating teaching across the college. Rather, they recognize that a variety of components are now used to document teaching effectiveness, including several different types of CTE's.

They were in agreement that CTE's have a place in evaluating teaching but only as one component of a teaching evaluation system. All stressed that CTE's should be used for professional growth as well as for personnel decisions, and that they should be interpreted only on a longitudinal basis. Most agreed that either a common CTE form or a common set of items with allowance made by departments for additional items would be desirable.

Disagreement existed on the usefulness of a visitation system to document teaching effectiveness, some being critical and others thinking it useful. All emphasized that more than one visitation and more than one visitor was needed. Opinions varied, however, as to whether or not the visits should be announced in advance.

In general, they considered the submission of course materials as useful, particularly when course objectives and exams were included. They did not view grade distribution data as providing much useful evidence on teaching effectiveness.

### Current Procedures for Documenting Teaching Effectiveness

The Committee interviewed a representative from each department during the period from April to July 1981 to determine what evidence and procedures were used to document teaching effectiveness. The Committee posed the following questions:

1. Who is evaluated for teaching effectiveness?
2. When and how often does teaching evaluation occur?
3. What is used to document teaching effectiveness? (CTE's, visitation, course materials, etc.)
4. What procedures are used to collect and summarize the data?
5. Is evaluation mandatory?
6. How is the information used? (for personnel decisions, professional growth, etc.)
7. What weight does the department give to teaching effectiveness in relation to other areas considered for merit, promotion and tenure?

The Committee found that documentation of teaching effectiveness was mandatory in 50% (12) of the departments and not mandatory in the rest. Of those departments in which documentation was mandatory, 33% (5) only required it for personnel decisions, 8% (1) only required it for non-tenured faculty, and 50% (6) gave no stipulations about its use. Of those departments in which it was not mandatory, nearly all recommended the documentation of teaching effectiveness for personnel decisions. It is noteworthy, however, that in general faculty members who are not faced with a personnel decision and those who have attained the rank of Professor are not required regularly to evaluate their teaching.

Of the 12 departments that require documentation of teaching effectiveness, 67% (8) use CTE's (usually mandatory), and 33% (4) review course materials on a regular basis. When all 24 departments are considered, 75% (18) use a form common to the department and developed by the department and 67% (16) have guidelines for a visitation system. Thus, when documenting teaching effectiveness, the most common tool used is the CTE. Although a visitation system is available in most departments, in practice this procedure is not commonly used. Submission of course materials appears to be used infrequently.

The procedures departments use to collect data vary greatly. In general,

most departments do not have a standard policy on the administration and collection of CTE's although a few have elaborate guidelines. The CTE usually is administered between the thirteenth and fifteenth week of the term. It may be given in every course during each semester or very infrequently, if at all. In other cases the faculty member being evaluated administers and collects the CTE form while in others a student or a colleague does this. The raw data from the CTE's may be tabulated by the department secretary, the department chairman, a department colleague, or the faculty member being evaluated. A statement summarizing the data usually is not prepared. When such a statement is prepared, the author may be either the department chairman or the faculty member being evaluated. Usually the data and summary statement are available to the faculty member and the department chairman. In some departments, this information becomes a part of the permanent file on the faculty member, while in others the faculty may choose to include or exclude this information. The results of the CTE's, when the department or faculty member uses them, are almost always used for personnel decisions. In some cases, a faculty member may choose to use the results in an effort to improve teaching effectiveness.

The procedures used in the visitation process showed considerable variation, ranging from the very informal to the very formal. The process may be implemented once a year, at the request of a faculty member, or not at all. The visitation team may consist of one to five colleagues. The entire team, some of the members, or none of the members may be selected by the faculty member being evaluated. The number of visitations that a visitation team member would make varied from one to three. The schedule of the visitations may be set by the faculty member being evaluated or by the visitation team. If the visitation team determines the visitation schedule, the time of the visitations may or may not be announced prior to the visit. Usually each visitation team member writes an independent report of the visit and submits it to the department chairman and the faculty member being evaluated. This usually is the culminating activity of the visitation team. In a few departments, however, the team meets with the faculty member to discuss the results. The visitation process, when implemented, always is used for personnel decisions.

The Committee asked departments to indicate the weight assigned to teaching when the overall evaluation of a faculty member for personnel decisions was considered. Nearly all of the departments indicated that the weight assigned to teaching varied depending on who was department chairman and the composition of the personnel committee. At the time the Committee asked the question, teaching was assigned as the top priority in 46% (11) of the departments; it received equal weight with scholarship and service in 29% (7); it had a lower priority in 4% (1); and the weight was not clear in 21% (5) of the departments. In the latter category, the weight assigned to teaching depended on the individual strengths of a particular faculty member.

#### Committee Statement

In summary, the Deans, Vice-President and President report to the Committee that from their perspectives they are confronted with widely divergent approaches to teaching evaluation across the college. They agree that greater consistency in standards and documentation of teaching effectiveness is desirable. The Committee's independent survey and assessment of the situation confirms the observations of campus administrators. For all practical purposes there are no college-wide standards or procedures for the documentation of teaching effectiveness at SUNY Cortland. Indeed, in some departments faculty are never required to provide substantiated evidence of their teaching effectiveness. It is especially true that after the continuing appointment decision, faculty may only rarely or even never have their teaching effectiveness evaluated. The Committee finds this a deplorable state of affairs at an institution which claims teaching to be

its primary mission.

## PART TWO

### The Value of CTE's in Evaluating Teaching Effectiveness

In any system which attempts to measure the teaching quality of college faculty members CTE's play only a partial, yet important, role. The literature on CTE's is extensive and, at times, contradictory. There appears to be agreement that "the validity of student ratings is modest at best and quite variable." (Dowell and Neal, p. 59) This is because the act of teaching is neither scientific nor does it lend itself to precise scientific measurement.

Despite the imprecision of CTE's as valid scientific indicators of teaching quality, however, they can play a limited role when used with caution as one part of a teaching evaluation system. As to the charge that they are unscientific, Dowell and Neal accurately conclude: "few university policies have a truly scientific basis." (Dowell and Neal, p. 61.)

It is essential to keep in mind that CTE's reflect student perceptions of teaching, not the quality of teaching in any absolute sense. It is important that these perceptions, along with the claims of faculty members about their teaching, comprise one component of a comprehensive teaching evaluation system. For it is student perception that is the clue to fostering or discouraging essential academic attitudes: the attitudes of inquiry, of humility in recognizing our individual ignorance, of diligence, of dedication, of perseverance, of a reverence for open debate and reflective thinking. In short, the college must do all it can to foster positive student perceptions and discourage negative student perceptions. The former will open the door to further learning, the latter might close it, perhaps forever.

There are at least three reasons why CTE's should be part of a teaching evaluation system. First, students can provide certain types of information that helps describe the classroom environment through their assessment of the overall learning atmosphere, the general communicative skills of the teacher and the degree to which course goals and objectives have been accomplished or the teacher's professional responsibilities have been met.

Second, students are in an excellent position to render some judgments about instruction. If good teaching can be defined as combining several elements--instructional techniques, reading assignments, course content, the teacher's personality, and student motivation and attitudes--in such a way as to have a positive effect on student behavior, then students are the most logical ones to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of the components of a course since they are the ones who have been directly and extensively exposed to them.

Third, CTE's provide one type of communication between students and instructors that might not exist otherwise. Such communication about student perception of the teaching-learning atmosphere can serve as the stimulus for an instructor to make changes in the course and how it is taught; or it can serve to reinforce the teacher's belief that the course is currently being taught well.

Any system of evaluation of teaching which includes the systematic use of CTE's as a component must be designed to reassure faculty members that two common abuses associated with CTE's will be guarded against. The most common abuse is for evaluators to use CTE results as a highly reliable statistical indicator of the quality of one's teaching. That is, faculty members must be convinced that the process of evaluating teaching will not be reduced to a mere statistical measure, drawn mainly from CTE's. Moreover, faculty members must be assured that any data drawn from CTE's will be used as longitudinal data over a period of several years and several courses. Only when faculty members are convinced that CTE results are to be used with extreme caution over a period of time should they be willing to allow for their systematic use.

Second, while much of the literature on CTE's is concerned with the statistical uncertainty of CTE's, a sizeable portion of it is devoted to legitimate fears faculty members have about any evaluation system which relies too heavily on CTE results. Thus, faculty members must be assured that CTE's will comprise only one component of a multi-faceted approach to the evaluation of teaching. They must know that they will have significant input into the evaluation process, thereby insuring that student centered CTE's will not be the only factor in an evaluation system that recognizes the complexity of the art of teaching.

According to the literature on CTE's, one of the greatest fears is that the use of CTE's throw professors into a sort of Nielson rating contest with one another, with academic standards and professional integrity being the casualties. The Committee has been especially sensitive to this concern. No system, no matter how judiciously applied, can negate this fear entirely. It can be minimized, however, by a system which allows the faculty to control the evaluation process and by a college philosophy that places academic and professional standards above a reliance on statistical ratings of teaching. This can only be accomplished as faculty members develop confidence in a comprehensive evaluation system that is cautiously and fairly applied.

Another legitimate fear is that the use of CTE's will serve to stifle teacher creativity and experimentation. This fear must be addressed by a system that allows the teacher to have significant input, that uses CTE results with great caution over time, and which is embedded in a teaching philosophy in which experimentation and creativity are to be encouraged.

Another fear is that a reliance on CTE's, with its danger of statistical simplification, will obfuscate the success particular teachers may have with particular subgroups of the student population--say those with greater academic talent or higher motivation. Any evaluation system must have sufficient teacher input to allow evaluators to become aware of these facts and to guide the interpretation evaluators may give to overall CTE ratings.

In summary, CTE's do not provide statistically precise information and while their use is encouraged to allow for student input--since student perceptions of teaching are important and need to be recognized--they must be used with great caution over time as one part of a multi-component system of teaching evaluation.

#### General Principles Which Guided the Committee's Recommendations

1. Teaching is the major priority of SUNY Cortland.
2. A systematic, regular evaluation of teaching is necessary for fair, responsible faculty evaluation, and maximum professional growth.

3. Presently the evaluation of teaching at Cortland is haphazard at best. A more systematic approach is desirable.
4. The teaching faculty should control the teaching evaluation system.
5. Everyone who teaches should be evaluated on a regular basis.
6. A teaching evaluation system must allow for a high degree of departmental autonomy.
7. The evaluation of teaching effectiveness requires examination of multiple indicators in order to assess the appropriateness of course content, classroom performance, and academic standards.
8. A teaching evaluation system should have components that are common for all teaching faculty.
9. The college must provide adequate support services to the teaching evaluation system.
10. Concurrent with the development and implementation of a teaching evaluation system a system for the evaluation of administrators must also be developed and implemented. The Committee strongly agrees with teaching evaluation authority Michael Scriven: "A system for the evaluation of administrators must be in place in order to avoid the entirely justifiable resistance of the 'serfs' to being evaluated by those in the castle, who are above such things themselves." (Scriven, p. 245.)

### PART THREE

## Recommendations for Developing and Implementing a Comprehensive Teaching Evaluation System

### I. General Recommendations

- 1.1 All faculty and administrators should be evaluated on a regular basis. Part of the evaluation of faculty should be the regular systematic collection of information from colleagues and students as the basis for judgments about their teaching effectiveness. Part of the evaluation of administrators should include the regular, systematic collection of information from faculty and students as the basis for judgments about their administrative effectiveness. (Information sought about administrators should concern their effectiveness of administration, leadership ability, responsiveness to relevant constituencies, innovative programs, competency, and soundness of judgment.)
- 1.2 The teaching evaluation system will consist of two components: (a) the administration of a CTE Questionnaire form, and (b) materials and information submitted by the teacher. NOTE: If a teacher does not wish to use a CTE form, an alternate procedure of visitation is possible.
- 1.3 Teachers will be evaluated, at a minimum, at least once every third time they teach a particular course. Departments will be responsible for establishing a time schedule for evaluating teaching. (Under exceptional circumstances, the recommended time schedule may be inappropriate. In such cases the department in question should submit to the Teaching Effectiveness Committee for approval an alternative in keeping with the principle of regular, systematic, longitudinal evaluation of faculty.)



## II. Committee on Teaching Effectiveness

- 2.1 The Faculty Senate will establish a permanent standing committee, to be called the "Committee on Teaching Effectiveness."
- 2.2 Composition: The "Committee on Teaching Effectiveness" will be composed of five faculty members, one from each of the following areas--Mathematics and Science; Social and Behavioral Sciences, Fine Arts and Humanities; Health, Physical Education and Recreation; and Education and Speech Pathology--and two students. The students will have attained at least junior standing (60 credits) and have spent at least one year of full-time residence at the College. Faculty members will be elected for a four-year term, with the initial terms being staggered so that eventually one new member joins the Committee each year. Faculty members will not be allowed to serve consecutive terms. Student committee members will be elected by the students, with the consent of the Senate, and are to serve for a one-year, renewable term. All of the College's Distinguished Teaching Professors will be permanent on-call consultants to the Committee.
- 2.3 Responsibilities: The "Committee on Teaching Effectiveness" will have the following responsibilities:
  - a. to oversee the development and implementation of the teaching evaluation system;
  - b. to oversee departmental compliance with the teaching evaluation system;
  - c. to ensure that quantifiable data drawn from CTE's are used on a longitudinal basis;
  - d. to ensure that departments are making qualitative judgments about teaching based on all documentation that is presented, not just the quantifiable data drawn from CTE's;
  - e. to approve departmental alternatives to the standard College CTE form;
  - f. to act as an ombudsman with whom faculty and students can discuss complaints about the teaching evaluation system and to make recommendations to the departments and division deans to resolve problems;
  - g. to work with the evaluation system administrative support staff to ensure the availability of adequate administrative resources (e.g., CTE forms, clerical assistance, computer time, etc.);
  - h. to make recommendations to the administration regarding resources needed by faculty to improve teaching;
  - i. to work with the Task Force on Teaching and Learning and other organizations to implement seminars, talks, and consultant meetings with individuals and the general faculty to discuss teaching strategies and problems of evaluating students; and
  - j. to make recommendations to the Senate to improve the quality of the teaching evaluation system.

### III. CTE Component of the Teaching Evaluation System

- 3.1 There will be a standard CTE form approved by the Committee on Teaching Effectiveness and available for use by any department that so chooses.
- 3.2 The standard CTE form should not be excessively long. The items will cover, at a minimum, the following topics:
  - a. definition of and adherence to the announced course requirements and coverage of content;
  - b. the teacher's effectiveness in presenting the course material (e.g., organization, structure, clarity, communication, teaching style, or lecturing ability);
  - c. the teacher's availability to meet with students outside of class;
  - d. workload or course difficulty;
  - e. fairness in evaluating students;
  - f. teacher-student interaction or rapport;
  - g. impact on students or students' sense of accomplishment; and
  - h. global, overall rating of the teacher.
- 3.3 The final decision on what CTE form is to be used by faculty members in a given department will be made by the department, with the following stipulations:
  - a. All members of the department will use a common form agreed upon by the department, and
  - b. while the form used by the department may exceed the specificity of the standard college form, the departmental form must cover the topics covered on the standard form.
- 3.4 The detailed procedures for collection of CTE data will be determined by each department, approved by the "Committee on Teaching Effectiveness," and subject to the following guidelines:
  - a. Student CTE forms will be administered by someone other than the course teacher (e.g., a student proctor, department secretary, or other colleague).
  - b. The form will be administered sometime during the last three weeks of scheduled classes in a term.
  - c. Raw data will be processed by the evaluation system administrative staff, unless departments have approval for alternate procedures from the "Committee on Teaching Effectiveness." There must be adequate safeguards against misuse or tampering with whatever CTE data the department collects.

- 4.1 The course materials to be submitted for evaluation should include the following:
  - a. course syllabus, including either a course outline or a list of course objectives;
  - b. assignments, examinations, and other materials that are provided for the students; and,
  - c. any other materials the teacher wishes to submit (e.g., information on advisement, the teacher's role in involving students in research, attendance at professional meetings, the teacher's role in assisting students with career plans, or examples of graded papers and exams).
- 4.2 Optionally, the teacher may provide a written description of the course including observations about the students in the course. Such a description might include: a general description of the level of the course, the student composition in terms of class year and major, information as to whether the course is required or not, and a general comment on the teacher's perceptions of the motivation and general intellectual level of the students in the course.

V. Additional recommendations.

- 5.1 Evaluation will follow specified departmental procedures for evaluation of teaching that will have been approved by the "Committee on Teaching Effectiveness."
- 5.2 Information drawn from the components of the teacher evaluation system will be placed in the faculty member's departmental personnel file, available for his/her inspection. These materials will be used for personnel decisions (reappointment, promotion, tenure, and merit) according to departmental procedures.
- 5.3 Faculty members will have the right to provide, in writing, their interpretation of any teaching evaluation materials at any level of the personnel review.
- 5.4 The College will provide the necessary technical, clerical, and financial support for the teaching evaluation system and for faculty professional growth and development.

VI. Exemption From CTE Requirement Option--Visitation System

- 6.1 Any faculty member who wishes to be exempt from the CTE questionnaire requirement may be granted an exemption by the department. In such cases a visitation evaluation will be substituted for the CTE evaluation.
- 6.2 The visitation team will consist of three members chosen according to the following guidelines:
  - a. The faculty member being evaluated will select one member drawn from the department.
  - b. The department, according to its own procedures, will select a different member drawn from the department.
  - c. The Division Dean will select one member drawn from a list of faculty members who have been awarded an excellence in teaching award or hold the rank of Distinguished Teaching Professor. This initial list may be expanded on recommendation of the "Committee on Teaching Effectiveness" with the approval of the Senate.

- 6.3 The visitation team as a whole will observe at least three classes in the course over a period of at least four weeks. Each visitor will write an independent observation report and will send copies to the person being evaluated and to the department.
- 6.4 The visitation process will be subject to modification by the "Committee on Teaching Effectiveness," with the approval of the Senate.

## APPENDIX

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