

**ORNELL**  
U N I V E R S I T Y

**TEACHING  
EVALUATION  
HANDBOOK**

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Third Edition

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## Preface and Acknowledgments

This handbook has been written as an initial step in responding to the report by the Dean of Faculty's select committee, *Evaluation and Recognition of Teaching*. It is the first document to address the technical and conceptual issues in evaluating teaching for tenure and promotion at Cornell. A guiding principle in its composition has been that a more thorough discussion and in-depth information would be most useful. As a handbook, it is offered as a guide to assist the complex task of evaluating teaching and it is hoped that, as such, it lends clarity and structure. It has been my intent to provide a useful document without being overly prescriptive or detailed. Throughout the next year, as this handbook may be used in the various colleges and departments, I invite the faculty and administration to provide me with constructive comments for subsequent revisions.

I would like to acknowledge the support of the President's Fund for Educational Initiatives, which provided funds for the development of this handbook. I would also like to acknowledge the generosity of encouragement, information and helpful comments from the following friends and colleagues: Professor Gary Evans, Design and Environmental Analysis, College of Human Ecology; Assistant Professor Bruce Lewenstein, Department of Communication, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences; Associate Professor Peter Zorn, Consumer Economics and Housing, College of Human Ecology; Professor George Hay, Edward Cornell Professor of Law, Cornell Law School; Professor Joseph Novak, Department of Education, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences; Kim Williams, Department of Education, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences; Joan Kessler, State University of New York at New Paltz; and Alan Wright, Dalhousie University, Halifax Nova Scotia.

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## **Introduction—Purpose of Handbook**

This handbook grew out of the Dean of Faculty's Select Committee report, *Evaluation and Recognition of Teaching*. That report's several recommendations were discussed at various college faculty meetings during the spring of 1992 and then presented to Provost Malden Nesheim and President Frank Rhodes who adopted all the recommendations. One recommendation was that "a Teaching Evaluation Handbook [should] be developed and made available to all colleges and departments in order to encourage consistency in the evaluation of teaching." The concern for consistency does not imply that the evaluation of teaching should be carried out in every college and discipline in the same way, using the same criteria, or that there is assumed to be some "correct" and universally appropriate model for teaching. Rather, the consistency issue is an institutional one that is meant to address the degree to which teaching is valued to the same degree throughout all colleges and disciplines and that its value should be evident in the manner in which it is evaluated. Accordingly, this handbook has three purposes: 1) to assist faculty members seeking tenure to document effectively their teaching and efforts to improve it; 2) to aid tenure committees to evaluate effectively and efficiently a tenure candidate's teaching; and 3) to help administrators—department heads and deans—ensure that the process of evaluating teaching for tenure and promotion is conducted with the same degree of rigor, fairness and thoroughness as the evaluation of a tenure candidate's research work.

The report's concern for consistency in the evaluation of teaching originated from an analysis of tenure files from throughout the university and interviews with the deans that were conducted in the early summer of 1991. The Dean of the Faculty asked the deans' permission to look at tenure files in each of the colleges. Nineteen tenure files were selected from seven colleges and schools for analysis. A selection was made from a pool of faculty who were granted tenure during the period of July 1, 1987, through June 30, 1991. The tenure files reviewed were chosen according to the following criteria: tenure had been granted within the previous three years, the candidate had at least a 45 percent responsibility to teach as indicated by the chair, and the broadest number of colleges and departments were represented in the sample.

The results of these activities revealed that the departments and colleges varied considerably in the thoroughness in which teaching was documented and evaluated for tenure and promotion. In some cases the variation was a consequence of the disciplines and their pedagogical traditions. For example, in both the Law School and the College of Art, Architecture and Planning, considerable effort is put into peer evaluation—including classroom observation in the Law School and the use of visiting reviewers of faculty work in the art and architecture departments. The College of Engineering has relied heavily on student evaluations of teaching, whereas the College of Arts and Sciences has many departments where student letters constitute the bulk of teaching evaluation data.

There is no question that different styles and traditions of teaching warrant different evaluation approaches. According to our investigations, however, the kind and breadth of data reviewed for evalua-

tion of teaching was generally limited, considering the complexity and range of faculty responsibilities associated with teaching. Teaching requires much time and encompasses a broad range of activities that includes general course design, classroom preparation, devising strategies to help students understand complex ideas and conceptual structures, effectively seeking and using feedback from students to guide the instructional process, designing exams and other means of measuring student learning, all in addition to keeping up with current knowledge of the subject being taught.

In the tenure files reviewed, direct evidence of teaching skills, such as course materials, was evident in only three out of 19 files. The bulk of evidence to support candidates' relative teaching quality consisted of student evaluations, either in the form of questionnaire scores or letters, and reports from departmental chairs. Minimizing data sources limits the evaluation of teaching to the judgments of a very few people with little means to follow the data that directly informed those judgments. It also seriously limits the available evaluative data on teaching quality and its development over time.

This handbook is designed to serve as a guide to encourage a view of teaching practice and its evaluation that reflects the intellectual challenges and richness that are an integral part of it, a view that does not dichotomize teaching and research activities as competitive with each other, but as two integrated aspects of scholarly activity. In an article appearing in *CUE*, a faculty newsletter published by the Office of Instructional Support, Roald Hoffman, professor of chemistry, described the reciprocal roles of teaching and research as a "complex dance."

The desire to teach others, enhanced by being obliged to teach others, leads to greater creativity in research. The rhetorical imperative operates to make a scientist or scholar examine widely the potential responses (objections?) of his or her audience. Teaching enlarges one's encounters with real audiences, therefore sharpens the imagined audience one engages in the inner dialogue in the course of research.<sup>1</sup>

The practices suggested in this handbook are not meant to imply that faculty members do not work hard at teaching or do not care about teaching, nor are they meant to burden faculty with unnecessary drudgery within the tenure process. Departments and colleges will continue to make their own decisions regarding the evaluation of teaching. This handbook is meant to support that process as a guide and resource.

## **Using This Handbook**

This handbook reflects the process of evaluating teaching for tenure and promotion, from the need to document the candidate's teaching and instructional development to the evaluation of that documentation's data by peers and administrators. It has been written to be of use to deans, department chairs, faculty members who are serving on tenure review committees and new faculty who are seeking tenure. The diagrams at the end of this introduction will serve to provide the reader with a conceptual

<sup>1</sup> R. Hoffman (1989, Summer). "Research/Teaching—A Complex Dance." In *Cornell Undergraduate Education*, vol. 2, no. 2, Office of Instructional Support, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY, 1-3.

overview of the handbook from various perspectives. Each diagram identifies major concepts, and lists the page numbers where that concept is discussed. This form of visual indexing at the beginning of the handbook is intended to save the reader time in locating required information.

The entire handbook was written to serve departmental standing committees on teaching and to be useful to as broad an audience as possible. Chapter 1 provides a conceptual overview that will be of particular interest to department chairs and newly hired faculty members. The major concepts relevant to the tasks of documentation and evaluation are explored, including the distinction between evaluation of teaching for tenure decisions and the evaluation of teaching for the improvement of practice, and how the two are related. This is followed by a discussion of what an explicit definition of excellence in teaching implies for the evaluation process. Chapter 1 ends with a review of the issues relevant to establishing criteria for evaluating teaching and how these criteria can drive the process of documenting one's teaching.

Chapter 2 will be particularly useful to the newly hired faculty member and to department heads and unit-based teaching committees. It presents a model for documenting teaching by the tenure candidate—the Teaching Portfolio. As a model, the teaching portfolio can serve to set the boundaries of the documentation task, including establishing criteria for inclusiveness that do justice to the range of responsibilities inherent in teaching, yet set limits on the amount of material included to ensure the efficiency of the evaluation process. Suggestions are made for what data can be included and how that data should be structured and presented to avoid bias and superficial treatment. Case examples are included where possible. Chapter 2 ends with a discussion of what the construction of a teaching portfolio can accomplish in terms of guiding peer review of teaching, the improvement of teaching practice and the establishment of standards for evaluation.

Chapter 3 provides some guidelines, based on a synthesis of research findings, for collecting and employing evaluation data from students and peers. It will be useful for department heads and faculty groups who seek guidelines for data collection and their proper use.

Chapter 4 includes an in-depth discussion of evaluating a candidate's teaching. As such it will be especially relevant to faculty members who serve on tenure committees. It begins with a consideration of general criteria relevant to evaluation, followed by an analysis of the evaluation process, including some suggestions for criteria of teaching excellence specific to each data source.

Chapter 5 broadens the discussion to encompass the relationship between tenure decisions and the improvement of teaching practice. It has been written to assist the collaborative development of teaching between faculty colleagues. It begins with a model of how an individual develops knowledge about teaching through experience and describes how to maximize the development of teaching practice through the evaluation process. Case examples are presented to illustrate how instructional development may be encouraged.