

# Appendix:

## **EVALUATION AND RECOGNITION OF TEACHING**

A Report of the Select Committee

Jon C. Clardy, Jere Confrey, George A. Hay, Walter LaFeber,  
James B. Maas, Constance H. Shapiro, Walter R. Lynn (Chair),  
David Way (Executive Staff)

January 14, 1992

CORNELL UNIVERSITY  
Ithaca, NY

## Preface

Tenure is a “rite of passage” by which our colleagues should expect to be recognized for their outstanding accomplishments as scholars and researchers, teachers, and contributing members of their professional and university communities. Exhaustive reviews and assessments help make it likely that indefinite tenure is offered only to those who meet the exacting standards of a first-rank university like Cornell.

The tenure process imposes great responsibilities upon everyone involved in making these decisions. The primary evaluation by the faculty of the academic unit is supplemented by those of the dean of the college or school, the president and provost on behalf of the central administration, and finally by the Board of Trustees. Each college has formal procedures governing its tenure and promotion review process. In addition, each department or academic unit may define what it expects of a faculty member in terms of teaching, research and service. Clearly these judgments ought to be based upon information and evidence that are relevant to the duties, responsibilities, and achievements of the faculty member being evaluated.

In spite of the highly selective recruitment of new faculty, not everyone is recommended for tenure. Recognizing this fact, the Faculty Council of Representatives and the Board of Trustees adopted (in 1981) a set of procedures granting a faculty member the right to appeal a negative tenure decision. In many of these cases, appellants had alleged unfair or unequal treatment in assessing their contributions as teachers. As Dean of the University Faculty, responsible for monitoring the University’s appeals process, it became apparent to me that the assessment of teaching is often less effective than the assessment of research—largely because of a lack of solid data and information.

Accordingly, I invited a distinguished and knowledgeable group of faculty to join me in investigating how we might improve the evaluation of teaching. I believe this report identifies viable means by which this can be accomplished.

Walter R. Lynn  
Dean of the University Faculty

January 14, 1992

# Evaluation and Recognition of Teaching

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In recent years the character and quality of teaching in American colleges have undergone scrutiny and criticism. There appears to be widespread concern that these institutions, especially the research universities, have neglected their responsibility to provide high-quality teaching.

Our Committee believes that teaching is vitally important. Even in a research university such as Cornell, quality teaching is a responsibility and condition of employment for every faculty member. We believe that, as teachers, we are obliged to provide students with the best educational experiences and to function at the forefront of teaching as well as research.

Unfortunately, it is our perception that, at Cornell, teaching has not been given the same degree of respect, recognition, or reward as a faculty member's contributions to research. This appears to be true both at the time at which tenure is granted and remains true throughout a tenured faculty member's career. A major factor in this imbalance is the way in which we evaluate teaching.

Our investigations have revealed that, while methods exist to evaluate teaching thoroughly and rigorously, the evaluation of teaching is rarely carried out with the same degree of thoroughness or rigor we have traditionally used in evaluating research. While some units make considerable efforts to evaluate teaching, others do little more than record, with little or no comment, the numerical results of haphazardly conducted student evaluations. We must begin to correct this situation.

We see the tenure period as an opportunity to gauge meaningfully a faculty member's progress in achieving excellence in teaching. Hence we addressed the procedures and practices used to evaluate the contributions of a faculty member's teaching as part of the tenure review process. But we see the need to establish a climate for consistent and regular appraisal and reward of teaching throughout a faculty member's career at Cornell. Further, by making teaching evaluation procedures and criteria explicit, we believe that all faculty members will be better able to enhance and improve their skills as teachers. Thus we endorse the evaluation of teaching in a time frame not different from evaluations made of a faculty member's research activities and accomplishments, and that rewards and recognition should be based on a faculty member's teaching contributions as well as research.

## THE CHARGE

The Committee was charged with the task of examining the practices and procedures used by the colleges and schools in evaluating a faculty member's teaching contributions as part of the tenure and

promotion process and to recommend minimal standards for such reviews. Accordingly, the Committee:

- reviewed the literature on evaluating teaching to gain an overview of what has been learned from research and experimentation elsewhere;
- learned how each of Cornell's colleges and schools evaluates a faculty member's teaching of graduate and undergraduate students; examined tenure files from the schools and colleges; and interviewed each dean{ 1 };
- recommended procedures and guidelines to help ensure proper assessment of a tenure or promotion candidate's qualifications as a teacher.

## FINDINGS

As a result of our study, the Committee finds that

- PEER REVIEW
- STUDENT EVALUATIONS
- OTHER ASPECTS OF THE TENURE FILE
- REWARDS FOR TEACHING

are areas where current practices are especially in need of modification and improvement.

### PEER REVIEW

Peer review of teaching ought to play as significant a role in evaluating a faculty member for tenure as does peer evaluation of research. Absence of the same degree of commitment to review a candidate's qualifications as a teacher reflects a lack of parity between teaching and research.

At Cornell, peer review of teaching appears to be the exception rather than the accepted practice. Some schools and departments do have a tradition of organized visits by senior faculty in order to gain first-hand experience with a junior colleague's effectiveness and accomplishments in the classroom. However, in most cases, the information in the tenure file about an individual's teaching seems to be limited to a summary of student evaluations and general "scuttlebutt." (For example, the following was extracted from a peer's letter contained in a tenure file, dated 9/28/89. "I regret that conflicts have prevented my attendance, since by all reports it [teaching] is excellent. My personal observation of his teaching has been restricted to slipping in at the end of his lectures . . . what I have heard has been clear, accurate and well organized.")

Examples of procedures at Cornell for conducting peer reviews are provided by the Department of Chemistry and the Law School.

The Department of Chemistry uses its Teaching Evaluation Committee to conduct peer reviews of departmental teaching. This committee, typically three faculty members with outstanding teaching records, visits lectures on an individual basis. All courses taught by untenured faculty and all large

introductory courses are monitored every semester. Other courses are visited on a rotating basis. Members of the committee discuss their impressions with the lecturer, offer suggestions for improvement and write individual reports. At the end of each semester the committee submits a written report to the department chair with detailed comments on problems and suggested remedies.

The Faculty Appointments Committee of the Law School evaluates the teaching of an untenured member of the faculty at the time of reappointment and then again during the tenure review. On each occasion, arrangements are made for several (usually about four) members of the faculty (often, but not always members of the Committee) to visit the classroom and write up a report. Each individual typically visits two consecutive classes. The reports vary in length from a one-page summary to a nearly verbatim transcript with commentary. The Committee then evaluates these reports in conjunction with the student evaluations and other evidence of student perceptions, such as letters or interviews with selected students.

## STUDENT EVALUATIONS

### Student Review Data

Without question, student evaluations of instruction through end of the semester questionnaires provided the most prevalent data source from students on candidates' teaching quality. However, these assessments are conducted in a haphazard fashion. Where quantitative data were provided, there was great variation in the form in which it was presented. There was little evidence, leastwise from the files reviewed, that established principles for collecting and reporting such data were used.

The Committee believes that numerical student evaluations can be a source of information about a candidate's teaching but that more rigor and regularity is required in the design and administration of these evaluations. In addition, the results of such numerical evaluations must be placed in context if they are to be of any real value. Some departments simply record the numerical results and provide no basis for interpreting the numerical scores or for comparing the candidate's scores to those of others in the department.

Numerical evaluations are only one way of determining how an individual is perceived by his or her students. Anonymous comments written by students in conjunction with their numerical questionnaires also can be quite informative. Letters written by advisees and students in a candidate's courses provide a more open format to evaluate the candidate. Because such letters do not enjoy the anonymity of numerical evaluations, however, they should be solicited and interpreted with discretion.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE TENURE FILE

From our investigation, it appeared that the elements of the tenure file used to document a candidate's teaching varied considerably by college and department. The Committee believes that there ought to be greater uniformity in the maintenance of the portion of the tenure file that relates to a candidate's teaching. In addition to peer review reports and student evaluations, the Committee feels that the tenure file should contain the following elements relevant to evaluating a candidate's teaching and teaching development: the department or unit's expectations for the candidate's teaching (as part of the appointment letter or subsequent communication); a statement from the candidate about teaching experiences and accomplishments, strategies and activities undertaken to improve teaching skills, and future teaching goals and plans; and teaching materials used in courses.

## Teaching Materials

An activity as challenging, complex and prevalent as teaching deserves more complete documentation than a list of courses taught every semester. In the tenure files we examined, only 3 out of 19 contained teaching materials of any kind. The teaching materials included in those files were inconsistent between departments and colleges. Some files limited this data source to a “teaching itinerary” which consisted of nothing more than the candidate’s teaching schedule: which courses were taught each semester, from year-to-year.

Teaching materials such as course syllabi, reading lists, handouts, non-print materials (or a description of them), problem sets, assignments, graded exams (both good and bad), student research papers and final projects, final grade distributions, and examples of written feedback to students on their work ought to be included in a tenure file and made available for internal and external reviewers to evaluate a candidate’s instructional design skills.

## Tenure File Development and Maintenance

At Cornell the elements of the tenure file which document a candidate’s teaching and teaching development activities varied considerably by college and department. The most frequent components of a tenure dossier<sup>{2}</sup> included: a curriculum vitae, appointment letters, student evaluation scores, department chair’s report, external referee letters, and the ad hoc committee’s report. Of these, appointment letters did not always spell out how the candidate’s responsibilities were to be divided between teaching and research and discussion of the candidate’s teaching by the department chair was frequently given short shrift in comparison with that devoted to research.

## REWARDS FOR TEACHING

The award of tenure is clearly an important form of recognition and is in itself a reward of considerable value and importance.

But beyond the granting of tenure, the Committee believes that the evaluation of a candidate’s teaching should continue throughout his or her career. Yet it is our perception that, once tenure is granted, there is little or no attention given to an individual’s teaching. Perhaps this is because department chairs and deans feel that once an individual is tenured, there is little that can be done to deter poor or deteriorating teaching or to reward good or improved teaching.<sup>{3}</sup> This perception may well reflect the present reality; but, if so, the Committee feels strongly that the reality must be altered.

The Committee believes that rewards for both excellence in teaching and instructional improvement/development must be established to provide faculty with incentives to invest in teaching on an equivalent level with research.<sup>{4}</sup>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee recommends:

- that it should be a matter of University policy that its colleges and departments treat and reward teaching and research on an equivalent basis.
- that departments and colleges, consistent with University policy, express equal value for teaching and research by maintaining and supporting the highest standards in their evaluation of both these activities.
- that rewards should be developed and policies designed for excellence in teaching and for significant instructional development. These rewards should include salary-based as well as non-salary based incentives (e.g., additional TA support, teaching aids, etc.) in direct support of teaching activities and should be designed to affect the largest number of faculty members.
- that all departments (or other appropriate unit) establish a standing committee on teaching. Committee members would be responsible for overseeing peer evaluation of a tenure candidate's teaching.
- that each college should have and enforce specific guidelines<sup>{5}</sup> governing what must be submitted about teaching in the file of a tenure candidate.
- that each college dean establish, maintain, and monitor guidelines for obtaining student course evaluation materials (i.e., questionnaires, solicited letters from students) and the way these materials are reported.
- that a Teaching Evaluation Handbook be developed and made available to all colleges and departments in order to encourage consistency in the evaluation of teaching.
- that the Provost take appropriate steps to set in motion the recommendations embodied in this report.

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## NOTES

{1} 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. In order to obtain a sense of the most recent history across the colleges and departments, 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% responsibility to teach as indicated by the chair,

and the broadest number of colleges and departments were represented. Additional data and background materials (review of the literature; examples of evaluation criteria, materials and principles, tenure file reviews; and interviews with the deans) can be obtained from David Way, Office of Instructional Support.

{2} Review and analysis of college and school tenure files, college and school guidelines, and interviews with each of the deans provided the Committee with a comprehensive view of tenure and promotion practices at Cornell.

{3} At least one dean provides rewards for teaching by dividing the salary improvement pool into equal amounts for teaching and research.

{4} Inasmuch as faculty do not begin their teaching careers with the same level of skills, an important criterion in rewarding good teaching is the degree of demonstrated improvement and development in teaching. If cash and recognition awards are limited to the “cream of the crop,” thereby reinforcing the already accomplished teachers to achieve better performance, it may discourage the less experienced and accomplished from making investments in teaching.

{5} These guidelines should prescribe standards for: •job documentation; •peer review data; •self-evaluation report by the candidate; •student evaluation data; and •teaching materials.

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