

NatSci Teaching Evaluation Guidelines

This document outlines guidelines for evaluating instructional quality during the reappointment, promotion, and tenure (RPT) review of tenure system faculty in a process that adheres to University's recommendations to:

1. Utilize **multiple assessment methods** to evaluate teaching performance.
2. Evaluate the **scholarship, creativity, significance, and broader impacts** of the accomplishments.
3. Consider the **context** of the faculty's efforts.

The teaching evaluation process ensures that high performing faculty are identified and recognized for their accomplishments, and that adequate support and mentoring is provided for faculty members in need of improvement. The responsibility for implementing teaching evaluation that accomplishes these goals rests primarily with the departments of NatSci. We recognize that these departments are a heterogeneous group, with teaching loads, course types, and student populations that differ greatly from unit to unit. A broad framework of guidelines is therefore provided to accommodate to the specific needs and constraints of each unit and faculty member.

Importance of Mentoring, Peer Review, and Feedback

The college expects departments to provide all newly hired tenure system faculty, and those struggling with their instructional assignments, with **mentoring** in teaching. Timely **peer reviews** of the faculty's instruction must also be conducted to identify strengths and areas for growth and to evaluate progress. Departments are also expected to **discuss teaching performance** with their faculty during the annual performance review and to provide **substantive summaries** of accomplishments in this area when their faculty are considered for RPT review.

The next section describes the documentation upon which departments should base their assessments of faculty teaching. The section following it describes the format of the summaries to be submitted to the college. The concluding section suggests some support programs and incentives that NatSci could provide to promote quality teaching throughout the college.

Documenting Teaching Accomplishments

Written materials documenting a faculty member's teaching career should provide multidimensional information on teaching analogous to the documentation of research

accomplishments. We recommend that the documentation in support of promotion, tenure, and reappointment decisions consist of the following items.

- **Student Evaluations**

SIRS and SLPS scores, or the equivalent, should be provided for all courses taught at MSU. Student opinion is one among many important instruments for assessing teaching performance, and uniformly low ratings can indicate a real need for improvement. However, the reasons for low scores can vary significantly and should be examined in the context of the department's peer evaluation. If student evaluation scores are no longer available for some courses, a list of those courses should be provided so that the record of courses taught is complete.

Student comments may also be summarized and discussed with the faculty member during the annual review form to better understand the responses and address any concerns. Comments from students may however be biased and, therefore, need to be contextualized.

- **Peer Evaluations**

Peer evaluations must be based on both classroom visits by faculty members from the department and reviews of syllabi and assessment tools used in courses. Faculty members who perform peer evaluations should be well informed about best practices.

Peer evaluations of teaching should be annual during the first two years of a faculty member's service as an MSU instructor, and they should continue every year if concerns arise about the quality of the instructor's teaching. A peer evaluation should also be performed in the year before the instructor applies for promotion.

Peer evaluations of all senior faculty should be performed periodically, in order to recognize excellence and to ensure that departments remain broadly aware of their own teaching practices. The timeline between peer evaluations will depend on departmental resources but we recommend that the period should not exceed five years.

The purpose of these peer evaluations is fourfold: (1) to place student evaluations in perspective, either corroborating them or providing an alternative viewpoint on the quality of teaching in the course, (2) to verify that the course goals outlined in the syllabus are clearly stated and appropriate and that the assessment tools are well aligned with those goals, (3) to review course content and exams to determine if these materials are appropriate for the course, and (4) to encourage an exchange of ideas among colleagues that enhances the quality of teaching throughout the department. Departments should develop their own processes for peer evaluations, taking

advantage of best practices outlined by the National Academies (see footnote on the previous page) and remaining careful to avoid the pitfalls described therein. These processes should be well documented and well known by the faculty and the college. Departments should resist the temptation to demand that faculty adhere to a particular style of teaching and be attentive to keeping the peer evaluation process from becoming politicized.

NatSci has created peer classroom observation and teaching portfolio evaluation tools that, at the discretion of the Department, can be used to facilitate this process. These tools are attached at the end of this document.

- **Teaching Portfolio**

All faculty members in NatSci will be expected to maintain a teaching portfolio consisting of three sets of materials provided by the faculty members themselves. The following list summarizes the elements of the teaching portfolio.

- I. **Syllabi & Representative Assessments**

This set of materials is provided to help peer evaluators determine whether course objectives are clearly stated in the syllabus, appropriate for the course, and adequately assessed by examinations or some other tool. A syllabus and a single representative assessment tool, such as a quiz, exam, or homework assignment, should be provided for up to three distinct, recently taught courses. Faculty members who have not yet taught three distinct courses should provide a syllabus and an assessment tool for each course taught. In most cases, the syllabus and final exam for a given course will be all that is necessary. If a final exam was not given or would not be representative, a more representative assessment tool may be provided. This element of the teaching portfolio should take very little time to prepare, as it consists entirely of course materials already developed.

- II. **Examples of Excellence**

When faculty members are considered for promotion, tenure, or reappointment, they provide a research dossier consisting of materials selected to highlight their most impressive research accomplishments. The types of materials provided can differ greatly, depending on the faculty member's research field and particular interests. However, they are generally selected to demonstrate what the faculty member him- or herself believes to be excellence in research. This set of materials in the teaching portfolio is analogous. Faculty members have many different points of view on what constitutes teaching excellence, and they should be encouraged to submit materials that exemplify what they believe to be their finest teaching

accomplishments. Any specific examples of successful teaching are welcome. We are simply asking faculty to summarize the high points of their teaching career. The following list is intended to clarify the kinds of items that faculty might file in this category of the portfolio:

- A statement of teaching philosophy describing the preferred style of teaching and substantiated with evidence* showing that it is effective.
- Examples of innovative teaching approaches or of teaching methods that effectively promote student engagement.
- Descriptions of new courses developed or of substantial modifications to existing courses.
- Examples of course materials or texts developed by the faculty member.
- Demonstrations of student learning (some examples include summaries of performance on pretest and posttest questions, descriptions of class projects submitted by students, or summaries of successful student research).

The list is not meant to be complete, nor should faculty be judged on the variety of items they submit—it is not a checklist. What matters most is the quality of teaching exemplified in the submitted material.

Up to three representative examples of quality teaching may be submitted in this portion of the portfolio, but fewer should be expected of faculty still new to teaching. Each example should be described in a single-page summary.

If a particularly noteworthy accomplishment cannot be adequately described in a single-page summary, supporting documentation may be provided. We recommend that these optional supporting materials be provided as an online or electronic appendix to minimize the paperwork burden. However, departments should consider implementing additional guidelines and/or page limits, in order to manage the burden on reviewers. For example, faculty members in some departments are asked to provide a sampling of their best peer-reviewed research papers when they are being considered for promotion, tenure, or reappointment. These are generally considered optional reading for evaluators seeking a deeper understanding of that research. An appendix submitted in support of teaching excellence should be viewed similarly.

III. Contributions to the Teaching Culture

Many faculty members contribute in various ways to create a positive teaching culture in their department, college, university, and discipline. Faculty should

provide a list of the activities they have engaged in here. *We are simply asking faculty to briefly summarize the ways in which they have worked with other teachers to improve the quality of teaching at MSU, either by providing or receiving guidance or mentoring.*

Examples of items that could appear in such a list are: efforts to develop graduate student teaching, mentoring a younger faculty member in teaching, working with a mentor to improve one's own teaching, collaborative teaching efforts, and participation in or direction of workshops to improve teaching skills. Reviewers should recognize that many of the items in this area apply more to senior faculty than to junior faculty, who may not yet have had opportunities to act as mentors and trainers of others.

The preparation of teaching portfolios is not intended to be burdensome and is most effectively managed by updating the portfolio each semester. Portfolios of junior faculty will naturally grow as their teaching experience accumulates.

Furthermore, during the next few years, reviewers should recognize that faculty coming up for promotion, tenure, and reappointment did not have these guidelines to follow until recently and should make allowances for that fact while evaluating their teaching portfolios.

Senior faculty should not be expected to produce complete teaching portfolios within an unrealistically short time period after these guidelines are implemented. The time frame over which senior faculty should develop teaching portfolios will depend on how a department chooses to do its peer evaluations of teaching. However, the teaching portfolio should be complete before the faculty member comes up for peer evaluation.

Summarizing Teaching Accomplishments

NatSci RPT guidelines specify that departments provide a written summary of the teaching evaluations of that faculty member (see Form PE-IIIA, “Evaluation of Instruction”). That summary should devote at least one paragraph to each of the following aspects of teaching quality, based on the department’s review of student evaluations, peer evaluations, and the teaching portfolio.

- Clear and Appropriate Objectives**

This part of the summary is based on peer evaluation of the syllabi and sample assessments provided in the teaching portfolio. Evaluators should address whether the course objectives and requirements are clearly stated in the syllabi and whether the objectives for each course are appropriate. It is also desirable for evaluators to address

whether the assessments are aligned with the stated course objectives and adequately measure student learning, but this type of evaluation may be more difficult for upper division courses with specialized content.

- **Competence in the Classroom**

This section summarizes the student evaluations and the classroom observations of the peer evaluators, who should seek to understand the reasons for either unusually high or unusually low student evaluations. Samples of written student comments can be particularly helpful in illuminating the reasons for the numerical scores. Positive student evaluations are desirable but should not weigh so heavily that fear of lower scores discourages faculty members from making changes that could improve their teaching effectiveness. If a candidate's student evaluation scores are persistently low, this part of the summary should explain the reasons for the low scores, as determined by the peer evaluators, and the steps the department and candidate have taken to improve those scores. As departments bear a significant mentoring responsibility, this portion of a candidate's summary will be one of the means used to assess a department's commitment to quality teaching.

- **Evidence of Excellence**

This section summarizes the elements of the teaching portfolio that the candidate has provided as evidence of teaching excellence. The documentation the candidate has provided should be available to the NatSci Promotion and Tenure committee upon request. Evaluators should recognize that evidence of excellence can come in many different forms, which may include:

- Evidence showing that students have made learning gains in the candidate's courses or have been effectively prepared for more advanced academic work.
- Documentation of exceptional commitment to student learning.
- Descriptions of innovative teaching by the candidate, which may consist of pioneering teaching methods, applications of new teaching technologies, development of new courses, or substantive revisions to existing courses.
- Examples of pedagogical materials developed by the candidate, such as textbooks, websites, or lecture notes, that have been adopted in other professors' courses.
- Teaching awards, as long as they come with a statement of the reason for the award.
- Successful mentoring of research students.

- **Contributions to Teaching Culture**

The last part of the summary describes how a faculty member has contributed to the broader culture of teaching, drawing on material provided in the teaching portfolio. As mentioned earlier in this document, in the section on teaching portfolios, examples of contributions may include such things as: efforts to develop graduate student teaching, mentoring a younger faculty member in teaching, working with a mentor to improve one's own teaching, collaborative teaching efforts, and participation in or direction of workshops to improve teaching skills. Evaluators are welcome to comment on how the candidate's contributions have improved the quality of teaching in their department.

Support and Incentives for Teaching Excellence

In order for these guidelines to be successful, the college must be willing to provide support to faculty members wishing to improve the quality of teaching in NatSci and incentives sufficient to motivate our busy faculty to devote some time and attention to quality teaching.

- **Support Programs for Faculty**

Workshops on teaching and learning are offered by MSU's Academic Advancement Network, the NatSci Dean's Office, and many professional societies (e.g. American Geophysical Union, American Chemical Society, Ecological Society of America).

Among the programs important to implementation of these guidelines are the following:

- Training in writing an effective syllabus.
- Development of a NatSci clearinghouse for sharing and disseminating successful teaching methods.
- Training in evaluating student learning gains.
- Training programs in peer evaluation practices.
- Funding for attending teaching workshops outside of MSU

- **Incentives for Faculty**

Evaluation of a faculty member's teaching for raises, promotion, tenure, and reappointment should be weighed by chairs and committees in direct proportion to the faculty member's assigned duties. Among the actions that the college and its departments and programs can take to motivate professors and demonstrate the college's commitment to teaching quality are the following:

- Efforts to explicitly acknowledge when excellence in teaching is a factor in raising a professor's salary.
- College-sponsored teaching awards for both junior and senior faculty that provide a recurring salary increase.
- Rewards to departments whose summaries of teaching accomplishments demonstrate that they foster a culture of quality teaching.