

A process for updating teaching evaluation criteria, for formative and summative purposes, at a primarily undergraduate Hispanic-Serving Institution

Jodi Cressman, Kelly Burns, Irina Calin-Jageman, Denise E. King, Anthony J. Krafnick, Yuanqing Li, Brooke Reavey, Penny Silvers, and Scott A. Kreher

Abstract

Teaching evaluation is a central process across institutions for faculty retention, promotion, and tenure. While there is a rich literature on methods for evaluating teaching, there is less scholarship on the goals and processes for reforming systems of teaching evaluation. Surprisingly, there is little to no information on teaching criteria at teaching-focused institutions, such as primarily undergraduate institutions. In this article we describe the process of reform of teaching evaluation criteria at our primarily undergraduate institution, which is also a Hispanic-Serving Institution. We present our newly adopted criteria for teaching evaluation for other institutions to build from and describe our process, along with predictable challenges.

Keywords: teaching evaluation, teaching effectiveness, teaching reform

Evaluation of teaching is centrally important at all post-secondary educational institutions in the United States for purposes of faculty retention, promotion, and tenure and increasingly for purposes of hiring faculty (Walsh et al., 2022). Furthermore, strong systems of evaluating teaching can provide faculty with valuable feedback to improve their teaching throughout their careers. There has been much scholarship over the past two decades focused on the types and uses of evidence in teaching evaluation. While student ratings of teaching still play an outsized role as evidence in teaching evaluation, there is a growing awareness that different forms of evidence should be used in addition to student voices, such as peer-review and faculty portfolios (Berk, 2005; Felder & Brent, 2004; Follmer Greenhoot et al., 2022; Uttl, 2021). Even as there has been robust conversation about the validity and reliability of teaching evaluations, we found relatively little about the process by which institutions might revise and reform the teaching effectiveness criteria that those student evaluations of teaching (SETs) measure. By teaching effectiveness criteria, we mean the set of practices and behaviors that should be present as part of effective teaching, that can be measured using evidence, and that should be both developmental goals and summative criteria used to make institutional decisions.

A foundational work describing possible teaching evaluation criteria is Arreola's (2004) guide to evaluating faculty, where he suggested that good teaching should be evaluated across various teaching roles, including instructional design skills and assessment skills. Fink (2013) expanded on the suggestions of Arreola with a focus on backward design, while more recent scholarship has pointed to the significance of inclusive pedagogies (Salazar et al., 2010), instructor self-reflexivity (Kumashiro, 2005), and data-driven approaches to teaching (Lovett & Hershock, 2020).

The scholarship on which teaching criteria institutions should be measuring has led to teaching evaluation reforms at University of Oregon (n.d.) and University of Southern California (n.d.), among others. Another notable example of a reformed system of teaching criteria

and evidence is the TEval project, a collaborative project between Michigan State University, University of Colorado Boulder, University of Kansas, and University of Massachusetts Amherst (Weaver et al., 2020), which includes the creation of a flexible framework of dimensions of effective teaching, evaluated with triangulated evidence, at these multiple institutions.

While recent scholarship of teaching and learning has motivated these and other institutions to revise criteria of quality teaching based on the evidence of how students learn, there has been relatively less scholarship on how these criteria might be best aligned with the specific mission and context of different institutions. For example, quality teaching at institutions that are small, teaching centered, and minority serving may emphasize different elements of quality teaching when compared with institutions that are large, complex, and research centered. The literature on effective teaching and teaching development at small institutions is sparse, as noted by Reder (2014). There is also poor representation in the literature of systematic descriptions of the various duties of faculty in departments at small institutions (Pifer et al., 2019).

Evaluating teaching is a complex task at any institution, though smaller teaching-focused institutions face a unique set of challenges. First, at most smaller institutions, faculty teaching loads are relatively high and teaching quality is relatively more weighted for retention, promotion, and tenure (King-Smith et al., 2021). However, as Mooney and Reder stated (2008), teaching quality at smaller institutions is rarely defined and there is less teaching development support. Second, smaller institutions have fewer support staff, often lack teaching development centers, and also have a high turnover in staff and administrators (Kortegast & Hamrick, 2009; Mooney & Reder, 2008). These issues can lead to lack of transparency about teaching goals and lack of continuity of long-term projects to evaluate teaching. Third, smaller institutions often have students bodies that are from under-represented racial and ethnic groups and are more likely to be from less-wealthy families (Fry & Cilluffo, 2019); this is especially true of

minority-serving institutions. Thus, consideration of inclusive pedagogy is extremely important for many smaller institutions to ensure student success and social mobility.

In the fall of 2019, a group of faculty members at Dominican University, a small, private Catholic liberal arts university just outside of Chicago, gathered to revise how we evaluated teaching, aiming to replace our 20-year old criteria with updated language that would (a) recognize the diverse teaching contexts within our small institution (contexts that include teaching by faculty with tenured, part-time, and clinician appointments, who are teaching both undergraduate and graduate students in a range of modalities and disciplinary contexts), (b) be grounded in evidence about student learning, and (c) be meaningful within our institutional values and status as a Hispanic-Serving Institution.

In this article, we present both the process we used to revise the criteria and the criteria themselves and then conclude with a discussion of our future steps. This description of our revised criteria and the process we followed will be useful to faculty and staff at many institutions, including teaching-focused or minority-serving institutions.

Institutional Context

Dominican University (DU) is a small, Hispanic-Serving Institution in the Chicago suburbs, enrolling 2,136 undergraduates and 1,060 graduate students in the 2022–2023 academic year. The institution has a religious affiliation (Sinsinawa Dominican order of sisters of the Roman Catholic Church) and a strong, historical commitment to a social justice mission. In the 2022–2023 academic year, 53% of all students identified as Latinx/Hispanic, 32% as white, 6% as African American, 3% as Asian, and 5% as two or more races or other groups. The university, which employs 139 full-time faculty and 306 part-time faculty, is organized into four colleges: Arts and Sciences, Health Sciences, Business, and Applied Social Sciences.

Teaching effectiveness is a central component of faculty evaluation for purposes of retention, tenure, and promotion. The university-wide faculty appointments committee reviews all full-time faculty for retention, tenure, or promotion, and the post-tenure review committee reviews tenured faculty. Both committees draw on evidence that typically includes a written narrative, student evaluations of teaching, and letters written by chairs or department colleagues that often reference teaching observations; letters from institutional colleagues are also often submitted, which sometimes include comments on peer observation of teaching. Committee members have often noted that the review materials submitted both by the faculty candidates and their chairs or deans often omit any mention of our official criteria for teaching effectiveness at all, even as they may describe teaching practices at length. The fact that the criteria were seldom mentioned suggested to committee members that they were perceived as not relevant, useful, or meaningful. We clearly needed better criteria that both reflected recent research on teaching and learning and were developed in response to faculty perceptions of what was most important within our shared institutional context if we wanted to strengthen our formal evaluation processes and offer criteria that faculty would draw on to reflect on and improve their personal teaching practices.

Committee members were also concerned about the heavy reliance on student ratings of teaching in our processes, despite the growing body of evidence of bias related to race/ethnicity, gender, discipline, and other factors such as low response rates (Boring, 2017; Fan et al., 2019; Harlow, 2003; Huston, 2006; Merritt, 2008; Smith & Hawkins, 2011). Committee members also recognized troubling patterns in the interpretations of these data, such as chairs or deans focusing on arithmetic means of Likert-like data instead of examining distributions of responses. Optional, written student comments were often cherry-picked by chairs and deans and included in evaluation summaries, to be used as evidence for effective or weak teaching, without consulting numerical data. While we lack formal data of the extent of these issues within our own institution, these problems with

student ratings of teaching data are documented across institutions (Hornstein, 2017).

We were eager to revise our processes for evaluating teaching, but we knew that we needed to start by redefining our criteria for effective teaching, which were often vague, not actionable, or completely susceptible to subjective interpretations. For example, our old criteria indicated that effective teaching required “organization of course materials” but didn’t specify the kinds of instructional organization that promote student learning (e.g., aligning classroom objectives to activities). Another criterion purported to measure the instructor’s “ability to communicate subject matter to students,” which seemed both to encourage a transmission-centered mode of instruction and also so vast that it would include nearly every aspect of teaching. Yet another criterion specified “availability to students for academic assistance,” which not only seemed to set a fairly low bar (e.g., just having office hours would seem sufficient) but also did not account for the ways in which implicit bias might shape student perception of faculty availability and approachability. Other criteria mentioned the “regularity with which courses are updated” or “new courses were developed,” which did not apply to those faculty, many times on contingent contracts, who were expected to teach a curriculum developed by full-time faculty in their departments. As a final example, an additional criterion indicated that effective teachers had the “ability to stimulate students intellectually,” which seemed both overly general and difficult to measure as it pointed to something happening within a student’s mind rather than a measurable behavior.

With one exception, these criteria were 20 years old. While there had been a recent addition of “*ability to create inclusive classrooms*” as a criterion, many faculty did not address this area beyond pointing to statements on course syllabi, perhaps because there were not clear explanations for how this ability might be enacted in specific teaching practices. Furthermore, given our institutional commitment to justice and our deepened understanding of what it means to be a Hispanic-Serving Institution, we realized that our teaching criteria needed to both clarify and center inclusive and equity-minded teaching so that

it was not presented as one among many other criteria on a list. We compare our previous criteria to our revised criteria to highlight the deliberate changes we have made (Figure 1).

Process for Revision

In May 2020, the Provost created a subcommittee composed of faculty representatives from our faculty appointments, post-tenure review, and diversity committees, in response to concerns about the teaching effectiveness criteria. The primary goal was to develop criteria and methods that would not just evaluate teaching, but improve it. However, we also knew that our goal of improvement depended on our ability to craft criteria that responded to our specific institutional and disciplinary contexts and to create a process that established faculty ownership over these criteria, even as we faculty did not always agree on what effective or excellent teaching was. Our entire process, from subcommittee formation to approval of updated criteria through university governance, lasted two years. We note that these two years also corresponded to the first two years of the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States, which surely lengthened our timeline (Figure 2).

The first task of the subcommittee was to research and discuss best practices in teaching evaluation. The committee met regularly throughout the summer and fall semesters, gathering research, resources, and identifying best practices from other institutions. While the initial stages of this project were challenging because of the personal, professional, and institutional disruptions caused by COVID-19, we made some tentative conclusions from the literature and other resources. One of the most striking conclusions from our research was how little information we could find on institutional websites. After reaching out for suggestions from the POD listserv, we were encouraged to look at public-facing definitions and processes developed by three research-intensive universities: University of Oregon, University of Southern California, and Vanderbilt University. Two colleagues from

Previous Criteria
Command of subject. The faculty member must demonstrate a command of the subject he/she is teaching. Such command can be noted, for example, in student evaluations, peer and Dean, Director, or Department Chair evaluations, pursuit of professional development, and shall be addressed in the faculty member's personal statement.

Organization of course materials. The faculty member must demonstrate an organization of the course materials that is easily understood, logical and cohesive. Such organization can be demonstrated in course syllabi and student evaluations.

Ability to communicate subject matter to students. The faculty member must have an ability to communicate the subject being taught to students in ways that facilitates their learning. Such ability can be demonstrated in student evaluations and observations by peers and the faculty member's Dean, Director, or Department Chair.

Availability to students for academic assistance. The faculty member must demonstrate his/her availability to assist students in working through difficulties with course material. In addition, the faculty member must serve as an advisor to a group of students assigned to him/her. Such availability shall be demonstrated through the faculty member's personal statement, student evaluations, and Dean, Director, or Department Chair's observations.

Ability to stimulate students intellectually. The faculty member must demonstrate an ability to stimulate students intellectually in the subject matter he/she is teaching. This can be indicated in student evaluations and observations by peers, Department Chairs, and Deans and/or Directors.

Ability to create inclusive classrooms. Faculty should incorporate inclusive teaching strategies into their courses. These strategies include teaching approaches that address the needs of students from a variety of backgrounds, learning styles, and abilities.

Fairness in evaluating students. The faculty member must have a transparent system of grading, which are then applied consistently to the work students submit in the faculty member's courses. Such fairness shall be indicated in student evaluations and observations by peers, Department Chairs, and Deans and/or Directors.

Regularity with which courses are updated. The faculty member must update the courses he/she teaches as new information becomes available and/or new techniques for teaching the material are developed. The faculty member must remain up-to-date on developments in his or her area of teaching through professional development and provide the latest information to students. This regularity shall be addressed in the faculty member's personal statement.

New courses developed. The faculty member may be involved in developing new courses that reflect changing trends in the subject matter or new developments that begin moving the subject taught in a different direction or an entirely new subject matter that is related to the faculty member's academic unit's overall interest. When such new courses are developed, the faculty member shall include the new syllabus and address the development in his/her personal statement.

Honors indicative of teaching excellence. The faculty member may receive recognition for teaching effectiveness from the students, his/her peers, his/her Dean, Director, or Department Chair, peers outside of the university, or the University itself. The faculty member shall include such honors in his/her portfolio that is presented to the Committee on Faculty Appointments.

Revised Criteria
 Dominican University's definition of excellence in teaching is grounded in the core values of *Caritas et Veritas* and in its identity as a Sinsinawa Dominican and Hispanic-Serving liberal arts and sciences institution (Institución de Servicio a Hispanos). Ultimately, the aim of teaching at Dominican University is to prepare students to pursue truth, to give compassionate service, and participation in the creation of a more just and humane world. In keeping with our focus on justice and our historical and sustained commitment to serving students from minoritized groups, excellent teaching must be inclusive and equity-minded. We accompany our students in their pursuit of truth through teaching in ways that are thoughtfully prepared and purposeful and that balance rigor with support. Finally, teaching excellence is a fundamentally reflective and iterative practice that evolves through new pedagogical and disciplinary discoveries and responds to new evidence of student learning and educational needs.

There are four main criteria with multiple sub-criteria listed beneath each. Faculty presenting their materials as part of regular reviews are expected to address each of the four primary criteria (inclusive and equity-minded, purposeful, rigorous and supportive, and reflective); however, they are not expected to address each of the sub-criteria in their materials in any given review period. Rather, they are encouraged to focus their materials on the evidence supporting their choice of a small number of sub-criteria (e.g., two or three).

1. Inclusive and equity-minded: Inclusive teaching employs multiple strategies to engage with all learners, valuing and welcoming the diverse perspectives that students bring to the classroom, and striving to create an equitable environment that promotes meaningful connections with students.

- a. Draws on students' individual identities, cultures, and life experiences as assets in learning.
- b. Uses inclusive, anti-racist, and anti-oppressive pedagogies to help all students learn and to promote a more just and humane world.
- c. Adopts universal design recommendations in course development.
- d. Recognizes and navigates complex power differentials among professors and students.

2. Purposeful: Purposeful teaching offers students meaningful learning opportunities through well-planned and thoughtfully executed courses.

- a. Establishes clear and meaningful learning goals for the course.
- b. Provides well-organized course materials (syllabi, Canvas sites, etc.).
- c. Offers formative and summative assessments that are clearly aligned with course learning goals.
- d. Prepares thoughtful class plans and adjusts them appropriately in response to student needs.
- e. Interacts with students consistently and respectfully.
- f. Strategically uses a variety of teaching and learning methods.

3. Rigorous and Supportive: Rigorous and supportive teaching challenges students to meet high standards, while providing them with a clear path to achieve those goals and offering help along the way.

- a. Sets challenging but reasonable expectations for all students.
- b. Offers students options for receiving support, whether from university services or other sources.
- c. Gives students useful and timely feedback.
- d. Communicates effectively with students via multiple modes.
- e. Promotes a growth mindset for all involved in learning.
- f. Provides a consistent and transparent grading system.
- g. Applies policies consistently, fairly, and equitably.

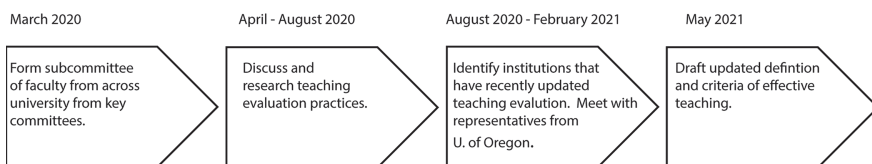
4. Reflective: Reflective teaching involves engaging with evidence of student learning, pedagogical scholarship, and one's academic field in a continuous process of growth.

- a. Routinely draws on feedback, data, evidence, and current findings of pedagogical scholarship for further improvement of teaching and learning.
- b. Recognizes collective and collaborative enterprise of teaching, for example sharing course materials, engaging in shared curriculum design and assessment, offering informal feedback on others' teaching, etc.
- c. Regularly updates courses based on current findings in one's discipline.
- d. Fosters student research, inquiry, and curiosity as appropriate to discipline.
- e. Tries new approaches to teaching and learns from successes and failures.

Figure 1. Revised Definition and Criteria for Effective Teaching, With Previous Criteria as Comparison

the Provost's office at University of Oregon, Lee Rumbarger, Associate Vice Provost for Teaching Engagement, and Sierra Dawson, Associate Vice Provost for Faculty & Leadership Development, were generous

Year 1



Year 2

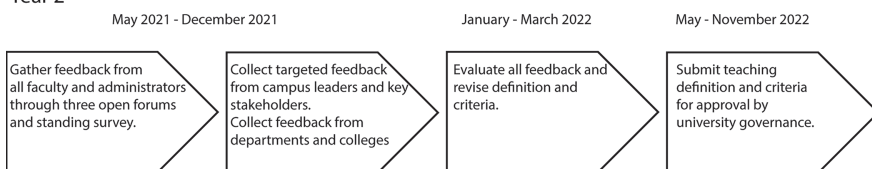


Figure 2. Process of Updating Definition and Criteria of Effective Teaching to Approval Through University Governance Process

enough to discuss their process of teaching evaluation reform. One of the primary lessons we drew from their experience, which we would translate to our own, was that if we wanted to create a sense of faculty ownership over these teaching criteria, we would need to engage with our faculty colleagues and other stakeholders *multiple times*, explaining what we were aiming to do and what our current thinking was and asking them for their feedback and suggestions.

Our first step was to draw from our reading of the literature on teaching effectiveness, with much of that literature cited in this article; many subcommittee members shared literature from their disciplines and professional organizations. Then, we reviewed our previous teaching criteria, noting that many concepts were useful, if worded in unhelpful or confusing ways. Then we studied the materials from R1 institutions, including University of Oregon, and invited subcommittee members to gather their insights on effective teaching from their professional experiences, such as inclusive pedagogy training and

workshops. For example, many subcommittee members had also been members of other working groups that had worked on core curriculum revisions and had worked in a U.S. Department of Education grant-supported inclusive pedagogy training group. In May 2021, one year after initiation of the project, subcommittee members drafted a definition of effective teaching with new criteria for evaluation of teaching and met with the university provost and deans to receive feedback.

We then entered the broader outreach and feedback stage. We designed a systematic and thorough outreach system, even as we acknowledged that no system could be comprehensive. The subcommittee hosted three open forums during the fall semester, inviting all faculty and administrators. We presented the proposed criteria and gathered feedback. The subcommittee also created a standing survey, with no closing date, so that all faculty and administrators could offer written comments. Subcommittee members also presented within their home colleges and departments to collect feedback. We also contacted key stakeholders directly, such as our Chief Diversity Officer and our Director of Core Curriculum, to gather targeted feedback. Finally, since the subcommittee was formed under the Faculty Appointments Committee, which evaluates faculty for retention, tenure, and promotion, we regularly met with that committee to update the committee and gather feedback. In addition, we also directly consulted with the Post-Tenure Review Committee.

All feedback was organized and sorted by criterion. Subcommittee members met in the early spring 2022 semester to consider all feedback for the purposes of making revisions. The definition and criteria were revised based on comments and feedback, and where we could not incorporate feedback because it conflicted with other suggestions or with the research on learning, we made a note about our reasoning. We felt that responding specifically and thoroughly to our colleagues' suggestions was essential for establishing a sense of ownership over the criteria. The final, revised definition and criteria were approved by the subcommittee, approved by the Faculty Appointments Committee, and submitted for approval by the overarching governance process in May 2022. The final steps were approval by Faculty Senate and

subsequent approval by the overall body of faculty through a series of meetings to consider and vote on the criteria. Prior to the final faculty body votes in the fall of 2022, subcommittee members hosted an opening year workshop on the new criteria and how to use them as a formative system and way to evaluate teaching development.

The criteria and definition were given final approval by the faculty body, with close to 90% approval, in November 2022 and became part of the faculty handbook in the subsequent academic year.

While one of our initial goals was to update our teaching evaluation system, including criteria and evidence, we ultimately fell short of the goal of updating evidence, which is discussed later in future steps and limitations. For more information about our process of reform, please see the appendices for example meeting agendas, survey text, and responses to feedback.

Updated Teaching Effectiveness Criteria

One shortcoming of our previous criteria was that they were presented as a long list, without indication about how they connected to each other or which was most important (Figure 1). With that in mind, we took inspiration from University of Southern California and University of Oregon and organized our new definition and criteria for evaluation of teaching around four main standards. Quality teaching should be inclusive and equity minded, purposeful, both rigorous and supportive, and reflective (Figure 1). We also crafted a preamble to the criteria that provides a definition of teaching excellence that explicitly aligns with our university mission and social justice identity and that grounds our teaching in our institutional status as a Hispanic-Serving Institution. To be clear, while our Hispanic-Serving identity necessarily informs our goal to better articulate what inclusive teaching means for us, we also believe that inclusive teaching is a necessary part of quality teaching at all institutions.

For each of the four main areas and various subcriteria, we made each point clear and actionable and tried to reduce the subjective

interpretation of each concept. The process of crafting each concept was largely dialectical, as we first drew on findings from research on learning to express criteria that were based on evidence of how students learn, and then we considered what those findings meant for teaching at our institution, with our specific faculty body, curricular structures, and mission. Below, we describe our new criteria and indicate the sources that informed our thinking.

Given our mission and status as a Hispanic-Serving Institution, we knew that inclusive and equity-minded teaching needed to come first. As we define it in our new evidence-based criteria, an inclusive and equity-minded instructor draws on students' identities and backgrounds as assets in learning (Banks, 2008; Pardon et al., 2002; Salazar et al., 2010), uses anti-oppressive pedagogies (St. Clair & Kishimoto, 2010), adopts universal design for learning recommendations (Burgstahler & Cory, 2008; Rose et al., 2006; Thurber & Bandy, 2018), recognizes and navigates power dynamics in the classroom (Burns, 2014; S. R. Harper & Davis III, 2016; Sue & Spanierman, 2020), and draws on evidence to address equity gaps (Lovett & Hershock, 2020).

Two of the criteria areas, "purposeful" and "rigorous and supportive," are fairly straightforward and generated little feedback or faculty dissent. While most of the subcriteria under these two areas would likely be generated by faculty at any institution as obvious elements of effective teaching, it's worth stating that these were not intentionally stated as goals in our previous teaching criteria. We defined purposeful teaching as establishing clear and meaningful learning goals for the course (Fink, 2013; Kezar & Maxey, 2016), providing well-organized course materials (Wieman, 2015), offering formative and summative assessments that are aligned with the course goals (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998), preparing thoughtful class plans (and adjusting them appropriately in response to student needs) (Bransford et al., 2000; Hake, 1998), interacting with students consistently and respectfully (Greer, 2014), and strategically using a variety of teaching and learning methods (Brame, 2016).

We replaced a previous criterion about being available to students with more comprehensive and balanced criteria related to rigorous and supportive teaching, which we define as setting challenging but reasonable expectations for all students (Kezar & Maxey, 2016; Lundberg et al., 2018; Margolis & McCabe, 2006; Orey, 2010; Yarborough & Fedesco, 2020); offering students options for receiving support, whether from university services or other sources; giving students useful and timely feedback (Brinko, 1993; Davis, 2009; Dohrer, 1991); communicating effectively with students via multiple modes; promoting a growth mindset for all involved in learning (Dweck, 2006); providing a consistent and transparent grading system (Galina, 2016; Walvoord & Anderson, 2010); and applying policies consistently, fairly, and equitably (Close, 2009; Whitley et al., 2000).

The fourth area, reflective teaching, was also not represented in our previous criteria, even though our university mission emphasizes contemplation, and our faculty colleagues almost uniformly recognize this area as vital to our teaching. For us, reflective teaching involves drawing on feedback, data, evidence, and current findings of pedagogical scholarship for further improvement of teaching and learning (Brookfield, 2017; J. Harper & Kezar, 2023; Lewis, 2001; Lovett & Hershock, 2020; Salazar et al., 2010); regularly updating courses based on advancements in one's disciplines; fostering student research and inquiry; trying new approaches and learning from failures; and recognizing the collaborative aspect of teaching (Gillman et al., 2016; National Association of Biology Teachers, 2012; Shulman, 1993). We wanted to elevate collaboration in our criteria to recognize that while efforts such as reflecting on learning across sections of the same course or engaging in curricular conversations, revisions, and assessments are time consuming and potentially formative, they are often not included in evaluations of teaching. Furthermore, explicitly valuing collaboration helps shift our perspective of teaching from a private practice to a more learning-centered view of teaching as a shared endeavor (Gillman et al., 2016).

General Challenges Encountered in the Process of Reform

In our process of revising our teaching evaluation criteria, we encountered some issues that could be present at any institution. We describe these issues below along with our responses.

The Goldilocks problem. During our process of research, drafting, feedback, and revisions, several issues arose. One issue was the Goldilocks problem: too many criteria, too specific, not enough criteria, missing concepts. Many of our colleagues commented that our new criteria contained too many items and that instructors would be unreasonably burdened to demonstrate achievement of all of them. Our criteria had grown, with the previous list of criteria listing 10 conceptual items, whereas our new criteria contain 23 subcriteria organized into four areas. At the same time, we also received streams of feedback pointing to a key concept perceived to be missing from our criteria, e.g., that we should specifically include culturally relevant pedagogy in our inclusive and equity-minded area. Both points were legitimate, and we had to navigate the tension between being actionable and comprehensive. Ultimately, we determined that our previous criteria were so broad and vague that one conceptual item in fact included many hidden subcriteria. For example, the criterion of “able to stimulate students intellectually” would include the choice of instructional materials, the ability to design meaningful assessments, and the ability to keep students engaged in class through a variety of pedagogical approaches.

Our new criteria were drafted to be specific enough for our colleagues to readily demonstrate how they meet or are working toward meeting the criterion. Another solution to this problem is to simultaneously address the criteria of the system and evidence used to evaluate teaching, such that they are aligned and actionable. However, in our process it became clear that we could not make timely progress on reform of evidence, so we had to develop better solutions to make the new criteria acceptable.

We worked through various alternative systems, which ranged from requirements to meet all criteria, to use of structured reflection inventories as supports for faculty under review, to systems where faculty chose a subset of criteria to highlight for any given review. We arrived at a solution where faculty under review would demonstrate how they meet all four areas, through two to three subcriteria of their choosing under each area. In the late stages of governance approval, this requirement was included in the text of the faculty handbook as protection and clarity for faculty under review. This is a workable compromise and allows forward momentum toward reform. We also note that this specific requirement can be changed without altering the overall structure of the criteria and future assessment is a necessary part of the long-term process of reform.

Excellence versus effectiveness. An interesting problem that arose during our process of drafting and feedback was the issue of framing our teaching goals as achieving excellence versus effectiveness. In our initial drafts, we stated that the goal of the criteria was excellent teaching, whereas our later criteria were stated in terms of effective teaching. While some faculty and administrators favored the aspirational goal of excellence, others were concerned that excellence could require too much subjectivity on the part of evaluators or set impossibly high standards. The subcommittee concluded that although excellence is a worthy goal of teaching, phrasing teaching as effective would be more helpful to faculty and would allow the process of transition to a new system to proceed more smoothly.

Future Steps and Limitations

Here we have described our process of reform of our system of teaching evaluation. Although we set out to reform our total system, including criteria and evidence, we fell short in making meaningful change to the evidence that should be used to analyze each criterion. This

was especially the case with the role of student ratings in the overall process. While it's true that any evidence of teaching would be subject to various types of bias and limitations, there are better solutions to making important decisions about people's professional trajectories than drawing primarily on student ratings. For example, there are known and egregious issues with student ratings of teaching data, yet our university and many other institutions over-rely on these data to evaluate teaching (Deslauriers et al., 2019). The next steps at our institutions and others are to acknowledge the body of literature on limitations and best practices related to evaluation of teaching and to make meaningful reforms. While student ratings provide some helpful evidence, they must be considered a part of and not the entirety of the evidence.

Because our criteria are grounded in evidence of learning, we believe that they will not only increase our colleagues' confidence in them for purposes of formal reviews but also be aspirations and anchors for self-reflection and faculty development in departments, programs, and colleges. For example, we can imagine our teaching center offering a series of workshops on universal design for learning, growth mindset, anti-racist teaching, or using pedagogical literature in one's field in ways that align and support the new criteria. Finally, the new structure may allow a better process for revision. Over time, some subcriteria may be difficult to enact or evaluate or may be more or less useful than others. With the new structure of four areas, subcriteria could be added, removed, or revised, while maintaining the overall structure of the system.

An interesting inspiration from our colleagues at University of Oregon was their use of their updated teaching system for teaching awards. Although we are a teaching-focused institution, we only have two awards given annually to the ~140 full-time faculty and none to part-time faculty. Our new teaching criteria can be used as the basis for an expanded set of teaching awards to recognize skillful teaching in an objectively decided manner.

Discussion and Conclusion

Here we have described a revised set of teaching evaluation criteria and our process of change in our context as a small university that is also minority serving. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 80% of higher education institutions in the United States have fewer than 5,000 students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). Our work on this process would have been impossible without the literature on reforming approaches to teaching evaluation. We also acknowledge that public-facing resources from multiple institutions and organizations were invaluable in our process, especially from University of Oregon, University of Southern California, Vanderbilt University, University of Colorado, and University of Kansas. Each of those listed institutions is an R1, research-intensive, university, and there is notable absence of resources from primarily undergraduate institutions (PUIs) and small, liberal arts and sciences institutions.

While quality teaching probably has many commonalities across institutions, there is a sparse literature on teaching quality at smaller institutions. Mooney and Reder (2008) wrote about the irony of the stated importance of quality teaching at smaller institutions, but where teaching goals are not often defined. The process of earning tenure at research institutions is often described as navigating hidden requirements for scholarships and grants (Cate et al., 2022); at many teaching-focused institutions, expectations for teaching are also often hidden. Our own teaching effectiveness criteria were only accessible in our faculty handbook, which is not publicly accessible, so that faculty candidates cannot easily know what the teaching expectations are. In a search for teaching criteria from peer institutions, we found that they were not publicly accessible and were not shared after direct requests, or we were told that such criteria did not exist yet. Prospective students and their families are also interested in understanding how their potential institutions value and promote good teaching (McMurtrie, 2023).

As a necessary correction, we are committed to sharing our resources and description of our processes. Our goal is to include our criteria and, eventually, updated evidence on our public-facing university website, not just contained in our publicly inaccessible faculty handbook. Our current teaching criteria are most likely inaccessible to our part-time faculty, and more access to criteria as teaching goals can allow us to include part-time faculty in teaching development.

We hope that our work is a step toward making teaching goals visible and comparable across institutions. Interestingly, Australia has a de facto set of national teaching effectiveness expectations for higher education (Devlin & Samarawickrema, 2010). In the absence of national standards of effective teaching in the United States, a solution is to better define effective teaching clearly within institutions.

Our revised teaching criteria and our description of the process of reform can help faculty and staff at other teaching-focused institutions. A central tension at many teaching-focused institutions is that teaching loads are high, there are few support staff, there is high turnover in staff and administrators, but effective teaching is central in decisions about faculty careers (King-Smith et al., 2021; Kortegast & Hamrick, 2009). The net impact of these issues is that faculty do not have consistent guidance for becoming better teachers and the work burden of development often falls on individual faculty. Clear and transparent teaching criteria can help faculty, staff, and administrators communicate about goals of classroom work, even in unstable environments.

Another attribute of many smaller institutions, especially minority-serving institutions, is that the student body has more traditionally underrepresented students and more students from less-wealthy families (Fry & Cilluffo, 2019). There are persistent gaps in outcomes for many of these students. For example, Latine students have a meaningful gap in college completion rates compared to white students (Excelencia in Education, 2024; Mora, 2022). There is a rich literature on teaching practices and behaviors that improve student outcomes, especially for underrepresented students, but as stated earlier, these skills and behaviors should be explicitly stated as instructional goals

(Tanner, 2013). Our approach to this issue was to expand our goal of inclusive and equity-minded teaching into many detailed subcriteria, which were clear and measurable. We also added aspects of inclusive pedagogy throughout our teaching criteria. In a notable report on the findings of the College Educational Quality study, Campbell (2023) stated that while overall teaching quality at some liberal arts colleges was relatively high, inclusive pedagogy was an overall weakness, pointing to the need for better inclusive and equity-minded teaching at smaller institutions.

Finally, it's important to acknowledge the complexity of generalizing about higher education institutions. The trends we have stated do not apply to all teaching-focused institutions, where some liberal arts institutions are highly resourced (Campbell, 2023). Additionally, many larger, regional institutions share the traits we have noted, and there are several minority-serving institutions that are large, research-intensive institutions (Campbell, 2023; Martinez & Garcia, 2020).

An important next step is for more higher education institutions to craft and share their criteria for effective teaching. Additionally, students and institutions themselves would benefit from more evidence of how we are meeting our goals of quality teaching. Campbell (2023) noted the general lack of information on teaching quality for higher education institutions in the United States; one finding from the College Educational Quality study is that there is a general mismatch between faculty self-perceptions of teaching quality and more objectively determined quality. While the success of reforms of teaching evaluation remains an open question, hopefully more transparency within institutions about teaching goals and increased sharing of information between institutions can improve teaching and learning.

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Biographies

Jodi Cressman is Professor of English at Dominican University, where she teaches writing, contemporary literature, and courses in the health humanities. Her publications include two co-edited critical anthologies on visual culture and the medical humanities; articles on graphic narratives, contemporary fiction, and assessing reading comprehension in college; and a scholarly overview of the relationship between life writing and depression.

Kelly Burns is a Professor of Philosophy at Dominican University, where she teaches courses in existentialism, ethics, and feminist theory.

Irina Calin-Jageman is a Professor of Biology at Dominican University where she teaches courses in Biology and Neuroscience. She is a neurobiologist by training, and her research focuses on molecular mechanisms of long-term memory and forgetting in *Aplysia californica*.

Denise E. King is a Senior Lecturer of Nursing at the Elizabeth T. MacNeil School of Nursing at Dominican University. Her professional training is in all aspects of adult medical-surgical nursing, health and wellness as well as standards of nursing education and pedagogies in higher education. Her teaching duties include undergraduate courses in evidence-based practice and nursing research, transcultural nursing, adult medical-surgical nursing, and nursing leadership. Her research involves creating a spirit of inquiry focused on evidence-based teaching methods and information literacy to enhance nursing practice and promote optimal client outcomes.

Anthony J. Krafnick is an Associate Professor of Psychology at Dominican University. He is a neuroscientist with a background in the brain basis of reading development, dyslexia, and multilingualism using MRI. His current research uses public datasets and meta-analysis to engage undergraduates both in and outside the classroom. His teaching duties include behavioral research and statistics, and upper-level cognitive neuroscience courses.

Yuanqing Li is an Associate Professor of Entrepreneurship in the Department of Management at Montclair State University. Her current research interests include cross-cultural management, international entrepreneurship, nascent entrepreneur behaviors, sustainability, and crowdfunding. Her work has been published in prestigious academic journals such as *Information & Management*, *Journal of Business Venturing Insights*, and *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research*. Additionally, she has written two book chapters and presented over thirty research papers at leading management conferences.

Brooke Reavey is an Associate Professor of Marketing at the Brennan School of Business at Dominican University. Her research interests include marketing communications, marketing technology, public policy, data democratization, and consumer privacy. Her work has been published in outlets such as the *International Journal of Advertising*, *Journal of Marketing Education*, and *Marketing Education Review*, among others.

Penny Silvers is a Professor of literacy and teacher education in the School of Education at Dominican University. She currently teaches literacy and language arts courses and children's and adult literature. Publications include articles and chapters about literacy and residency-based undergraduate education programs. Research interests include culturally responsive, democratic teacher education that expands sociocultural awareness; critical multiliteracies; and engaged learning through critical inquiry.

Scott A. Kreher is a Professor of Biology at Dominican University. His training is in genetics, molecular biology, and evolution and his teaching duties include undergraduate courses in introductory biology, genetics, and research methods. His research involves discipline-based education projects, focused on evidence-based teaching methods to improve conceptual understanding of science process skills and transfer of learning to scientific literacy.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors have no conflicts of interest.

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Appendices

- I. Committee membership and sample meeting agendas for the subcommittee
- II. Committee goals that surfaced at first committee meeting
- III. Definitions of quality teaching at other institutions
- IV. Survey text, from Qualtrics, for faculty feedback
- V. Example feedback table
- VI. Materials Submitted for Teaching Evaluation (Promotion and Tenure) from Dominican University Faculty Handbook, 2018

I. Committee membership and meeting agendas for the subcommittee

A. Committee Membership

Name	Affiliations
Diversity Committee	Philosophy
Post-tenure Review Committee	Biology
Faculty Appointments Committee	English
Interim Director of Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence (CTLE)	Library and Information Science
Faculty Appointments Committee / CTLE Advisory Subcommittee	Political Science
Core Curriculum	Psychology
Faculty Appointments Committee	Biology
Diversity Committee	Marketing
Faculty Appointments Committee	Education

B. Subcommittee Meeting Agenda (First meeting - May 2021)

- I. Define overall focus of the subcommittee
 - a. Is our focus to create a definition of effective teaching and update text regarding effective teaching criteria in the faculty handbook *only*?

- b. Is our focus to create a definition of effective teaching and update text regarding effective teaching criteria in the faculty handbook AND to also update and reimagine evidence to evaluate effective teaching, also as stated in the faculty handbook?
 - II. Evaluate representation of subcommittee: Add members?
 - III. Define subcommittee goals, along with tentative timelines
 - IV. Draft criteria of good/effective/excellent teaching
 - V. Schedule summer meetings
 - VI. Divide labor and tasks into one of two groups:

Option A Groups

- Teaching effectiveness criteria text
- Evidence reconceptualization
- Plan for communication, feedback incorporation, and ongoing training

Option B Groups

- Text describing instructor reflection
 - Reconceptualization of student input on teaching as evidence
 - Planning for peer-review of teaching process
-

C. Subcommittee Meeting Agenda (August 2021)

- I. Restate overall goals for summer work:
 - a. Draft effective teaching definition and criteria
 - b. List reimagined evidence for evaluating teaching
 - c. Create plan for genuine communication and feedback during 2021–2022 academic year
- II. Discuss and approve updated working draft teaching definition and criteria
- III. Status report on independent tasks:
 - a. Update of instructor narrative/reflection
 - b. Student experience survey pilot
 - c. Framing text and examples for definition and criteria
- IV. Plans for community feedback during 2021–2022 academic year:
 - a. CTLE conversation series – scheduling with CTLE director
 - b. Open Qualtrics survey – digital open forum
 - c. Meet with committees (FAC, Post-tenure, diversity, etc.)
 - d. College-level meetings – Scheduling underway with RCAS

- e. Department/program meetings
- f. Gather input from adjunct instructors – Adjunct Faculty Senate rep.
- g. Collect feedback during fall 2021 meet in late semester to revise and update draft.
- h. Meet with senate executive committee to discuss process of approval and how this would affect faculty for future reviews.
- i. Meet with deans team on Mon. Aug. 9 about subcommittee work

II. Committee goals that surfaced at first committee meeting

- Draft a definition of good/effective/excellent teaching at DU, grounded in our mission and identity, with a special focus on inclusion and our HSI identity.
- Draft revised Faculty Handbook text describing teaching effectiveness evaluation criteria, aligned with teaching definition.
- Draft revised and reconceptualized list of evidence, as stated in Faculty Handbook, which is used to evaluate effective teaching, aligned with evidence and definition of teaching as much as possible:
- Revise description of instructor narrative statement to emphasize reflection
- Revise current student evaluation of teaching process and adapt U. of Oregon model: instrument given twice per semester; mid-term data is only given to instructor. Questions are in the form of student experiences; response categories are in form of U. of Oregon model; final product is emphasis on instructor feedback.
- Create structured peer-review of teaching model, drawing on best practices from U. of Oregon, North Carolina State U. etc.
- Identify all stakeholders who should give feedback and who will eventually use the revised process:
- Create a CTLE-hosted website that acts as description/commentary on Handbook text on teaching evaluation criteria and evidence,

which may also have example documents, to help all stakeholders understand the process:

- Set up a process of soliciting feedback from all stakeholders on draft materials over the 2021–2022 academic year and a process of genuinely incorporating feedback into updated drafts:
 - Open-forums: always clearly state the process of revisions and drafts in a transparent way
 - CTLE conversation presentations
 - Survey of faculty and survey/focus-groups of students
 - Emails/newsletters: always clearly state the process of revisions and drafts in a transparent way
 - Department visits
 - Talk to various committees and chairs
 - Communicate with Provost and deans
 - Communicate with Faculty Senate
 - Create intermediate reports, updated drafts, and products, that are given to people with enough time to read and process for meaningful feedback
 - Communicate clearly about how feedback is incorporated and communicate clearly with all stakeholders about how drafts have been updated
- Create a common set of resources (articles, websites, books, etc.) that can serve as an intellectual foundation for criteria and evidence, which can be shared with faculty and administrators to guide in-depth thinking about the process, in an ongoing manner.
- Create ongoing training for stakeholders in using the revised process:
- Create incentives for engagement:
 - Create new faculty teaching awards (in addition to current awards) that are decided using new criteria and evidence; could be hosted by CTLE
 - Obtain modest funding to support scholarship of teaching and research fellowships to allow formal research on our process, which could lead to presentations and publication. Could be hosted by CTLE

- Obtain more funding from Provost? (We had \$8,000 for the 2020–2021 academic year)

III. Definitions of quality teaching at other institutions

University of Oregon

<https://teaching.uoregon.edu/resources/teaching-excellence>

University of Southern California

<http://cet.usc.edu/about/usc-definition-of-excellence-in-teaching/>

University of California – Santa Barbara

<https://otl.ucsb.edu/faculty/teaching-effectivenessmerit-review>

University of Maryland – Baltimore County

<https://www.umaryland.edu/fctl/about/>

IV. Survey text, from Qualtrics, for faculty feedback

Survey was set up so that respondents can answer as many times as they would like, but survey is non-anonymous.

Directions:

This is a non-anonymous digital suggestion box for the proposed draft definition and criteria. You can submit suggestions throughout the fall 2021 semester as many times as you would like.

Questions:

Name:

Email:

Status:

Full-time faculty

Part-time faculty

Administration

Staff

Other

College:

Department/Program/School:

How do the proposed definition and criteria describe the best of our work at DU? Please explain your answer. (open-ended text)

What suggestions do you have for changes, edits, or additions? Please be specific in your answer. (open-ended text)

Our goal is to create a table of examples and references that would help everyone understand the criteria. What suggestions do you have for specific examples of the criteria or references that would be helpful? Please be specific. (open-ended text)

What types of training or support would help you to understand the criteria and how to use them for review during retention, promotion, tenure, etc? Please be specific. (open-ended text)

V. Example feedback table

Existing draft language	Suggestion	Notes/questions about that suggestion	Resolution/ Decision
1. a. Draws on students' individual identities, cultures, and life experiences as assets in learning.	No feedback		
1. b. Uses inclusive, anti-racist, and anti-oppressive pedagogies to help all students learn and to promote a more just and humane world.	Specifically add: Uses culturally relevant pedagogy	Important, given our mission and institutional status Will that addition create unhelpful overlap among these items? How many items can be managed practically and meaningfully?	Decided against adding this at this time.

(Continued)

(Continued)

Existing draft language	Suggestion	Notes/questions about that suggestion	Resolution/ Decision
2. c. Adopts universal design recommendations in course development.	Spell out more extensively the language on universal design: what is this and what does it look like. A faculty member may be a very good resource for us here; she will be leading a CEI subcommittee on universal design. (#24)	Faculty will need more support around this item Does this more extensive language belong here or in supplementary material	Decided not to expand the criteria, but recognize the need for faculty development resources and events to deepen understanding of this goal
3. d. Promotes equity by recognizing systemic barriers and by connecting students with appropriate university resources.	I find 1d and 3b to feel similar when reading them within their lists. The suggestions in the table help me differentiate between them, but "resources" and "support" do have similar connotations, to me at least. (#16) We should revisit the language. The key idea is that we want faculty to understand that our students face barriers and know which resources to refer them to. (#24)	It may be confusing for faculty to distinguish this criteria from the one we have in the third section about supporting students	Removed item from this section
4. e. Recognizes and navigates complex power differentials among professors and students.	Add "and campus climate" after students (#23)	This is an important goal, but is this a reasonable expectation of faculty who are new, untenured, or on adjunct contracts	Did not take suggestion
f. Draws on data/ evidence in an effort to address equity issues.	No feedback		

VI. Materials Submitted for Teaching Evaluation (Promotion and Tenure) from Sinsinawa Faculty Handbook, 2018

This table provides the areas used to review a faculty member for retention, promotion, tenure, and post-tenure review. It also notes those who are responsible for ensuring each area is complete and up-to-date. The faculty member is also responsible for providing the additions to the portfolio.

Input	Contents
Administrative Inputs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summary Faculty Profile of the cumulative list of the number of courses taught each semester, enrollment figures in each course, etc. or description of librarian's main contributions; the initial letter of appointment • Letters from the Provost and the Dean or University Librarian • Letters from the Director of the Core Curriculum, Department Chairs and/or Discipline Coordinators, in the case of the undergraduate faculty • Letters from colleagues and from other administrative officers Previous years' letters from the President to the faculty member, regarding renewal, tenure-track status, promotion, tenure and post-tenure review • Performance evaluations by Dean, Director, or University Librarian, Director of the Core Curriculum, Department Chairs and/or Discipline Coordinators. Student evaluations of teaching effectiveness
Faculty Member Inputs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Curriculum vitae</i> • Personal statement (no longer than five pages) incorporating self-evaluation of the faculty member's performance, according to the relevant criteria for decisions regarding renewal, tenure, sabbaticals, leaves, promotions or post-tenure review. In the personal statement the faculty member should take care to ensure that members of relevant committees understand how the faculty member believes activities and achievements fulfill particular criteria for renewal, promotion, tenure, etc. • Any responses the faculty member wishes to make to the letters of recommendation and/or to the performance evaluations • Letters from colleagues at other institutions or other outside references who may address questions relevant to the faculty member's performance; such letters might include, for example, evaluations of the faculty member's research or creative works or other contributions to the work of the discipline

(Continued)

(Continued)

Input	Contents
Additions to the Portfolio	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For purposes of a particular review, the faculty member provides copies of scholarly publications, reviews of exhibitions or performances or of scholarly publications, teaching materials, or any other materials relevant to an evaluation of the faculty member's performance. Such materials will be added temporarily to the faculty portfolio for review by the Faculty Appointments or Post Tenure Review Committee. The materials will be returned to the faculty member when the review has been completed.
Updates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty portfolios will be updated regularly as necessary for decisions regarding renewal, tenure- track status, leaves, sabbaticals, promotion, tenure and/or post tenure review.
Personal Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After the Portfolio is complete, but before the Committee on Faculty Appointments meets to decide its recommendation on questions of renewal, promotion or tenure, the faculty member may request the opportunity to address the Committee on Faculty Appointments with respect to particular items in the Portfolio.