The Role of Teaching

In
HIRING,
PROMOTION, &
TENURE
at the
University of
Minnesota

A Statement of the
Academy of Distinguished Teachers

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SUMMARY

In practice, the accounting of teaching focuses on the in-class course hours and does not acknowledge all its forms. How teaching is defined impacts how it is considered for hiring, tenure, and promotion decisions. If teaching is to be seen as having a priority, the message needs to be clearly articulated and addressed at the start of a faculty member’s career at the University of Minnesota. Further, current practice for accounting efforts in research, service, and teaching forces a separation among these components; the impact that results is the diminishment of all. Because it is not feasible to do everything, much less do it all well, enough flexibility must exist so faculty can prioritize their efforts and time. Therefore, it is proposed that a broad view of teaching be adopted that acknowledges its various activities, and that policies and procedures be put in place that will foster excellence in teaching.
This paper from the Academy of Distinguished Teachers (ADT) grew out of concerns raised at the inaugural meeting of the Academy. Seven Academy members, representing different campuses and departments of the University, began discussions on the topic of the role of teaching in hiring, promotion, and tenure decisions at the University during Fall, 1999. The group started with reflections on concerns and points raised at the first Academy retreat; built on an earlier (1995) report by the Committee on Teaching and Learning, Kenneth Heller, Chair; and incorporated their own observations and experiences with input from Academy members at a subsequent Academy retreat. The final report was developed from those discussions.

To begin tackling the Hiring/Promotion/Tenure (HPT) issue, the question of how to define teaching at the University is relevant. The tenure code notes that “Teaching’ is not limited to credit-producing classroom instruction. It encompasses other forms of communication of knowledge (both to students registered in the University and to other persons in the community) as well as the supervision or advising of individual graduate or undergraduate students.” In practice, the accounting of teaching focuses on the (in-class) course hours and does not acknowledge all the other forms of teaching—advising, reading drafts of student papers (or MA/Ph.D. theses), working with TA's on courses, supervising interns, lecturing outside of the regular classroom, responding to student and other e-mail queries, etc. How teaching is defined impacts how it is considered for H/P/T issues. We believe that it is important to adopt a broad view of teaching to acknowledge the impact that many of our interactions with students and others have on their learning and development.
The synergism that exists among teaching, research, and service was highlighted in our discussions. The current accounting system forces a separation among these professional activities. For example, supervision of UROP projects does not fit neatly into any one category—the students are required to relate their research to the faculty members’ and show the potential impact within the discipline; therefore often advancing the faculty’s research, but there is clearly a large teaching impact from this interaction. Research is itself a teaching function through mentoring, collaboration, employment and the like. Attempting to separate the impact of such an endeavor diminishes it. Research informs our teaching; teaching enriches and challenges our research; our service derives from both teaching and research and feeds back into both. Accordingly, we often returned to the “research vs. teaching” struggle and found it to be largely a false dichotomy. Unfortunately, in practice, the separation between teaching and research is treated as “real,” with research more often than not carrying the weight for hiring, tenure, and promotion decisions.

Other themes of the discussion included the often-competing demands among departmental, college, individual faculty, and student needs, exacerbated by the sources and allocation of rewards. At the departmental and college levels, success is marked by the number of books/articles and the size of grants, patents, and the like, yet there is a need to provide courses for, and substantial interaction with, students. Students need the educational services. In the middle stand the faculty who have their own strengths and demands and know what is rewarded. Departments need people to teach effectively (and IMG has increased the need for attracting and keeping students in classes), but reward teaching on a lower level. Change will only occur when departments are significantly rewarded for effective teaching and it is acknowledged that a departmental balance between teaching and research needs to translate into rewards for the individual faculty members that allow that balance to occur.

Another running theme in the discussion was the prioritization that results from scarcity of time and other resources. It is not feasible to do everything, much less do it all well. Therefore, people prioritize their efforts and time. There is not enough flexibility in the
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existing systems for people to exercise that prioritization without penalty. A common compensation for added University duties is course release, and it is not uncommon that the best teachers are the ones called upon for these additional duties. The message is that teaching is a burden and expendable. We need to be more creative in how time demands are adjusted and the outcomes of those adjustments rewarded. Further, excellence requires appropriate infrastructure, support, and staff.

The April, 1995, Report of the Committee on Teaching and Learning (Kenneth Heller, Chair) was distributed to our group, as to others, and served as a useful basis for our developing position. We were particularly struck by the overlap between the issues being raised in our group’s discussions and the ones noted in that earlier report. Although the focus and wording of that original report was focused on “improving teaching and learning on the Twin Cities campus” (p. 1), it was our group’s opinion that many of the issues raised had University-wide relevance. It should also be noted that there are many areas within the University where many of these recommendations are already standard practice, without negative impact on the other parts of the University’s mission (i.e., research). Therefore, a reiteration of many points raised by the Committee on Teaching and Learning is included here.

In particular, recommendations 14-22 from that committee’s report continue to have direct relevance to H/P/T. Those points are repeated below, with changes that have occurred since 1995 noted.

KEY RECOMMENDATION: Develop guidelines that allow colleges and departments to offer flexible, differential assignments for faculty.

Recommendation 14. Deans and department chairs should establish differential assignments that include annual salary adjustments and other commensurate rewards based on the value of teaching and other educational support functions (i.e., course development, TA education) to a department on a par with research.
Recommendation 15. [Deans and Department Heads] should establish clear guidelines that support faculty initiatives to teach courses in cooperation with other departments/colleges as part of their regular load.

**KEY RECOMMENDATION:** Assure that the reward structure supports departmental responsibility for the quality of teaching and atmosphere of learning.

Recommendation 17*. [Chancellors and deans] should explore ways to provide rewards to units, not just individuals, for high quality teaching (or for research or outreach). For example, a department could negotiate with a dean on the quantity and quality of teaching contributions (including how to document that quality), and then have budget allocations linked to successful outcomes.

Recommendation 18. Deans should propose to their faculties that colleges amend promotion and tenure guidelines to include a “teaching narrative” (similar to the “research narrative” now required by many colleges) for both tenure and promotion dossiers. [This is now University policy. The next step is in assuring that these teaching narratives and portfolios are attended to in P&T discussions and that criteria for evaluation exist and are applied.]

Recommendation 19. Faculty and department chairs should include teaching as a criterion in all tenured and tenure-track hiring. [Here, again, where this is already in practice, clear criteria for evaluation need to be incorporated and demonstrated by appropriate materials, e.g., sample syllabi, classroom presentations reflective of actual teaching requirements for the position, teaching philosophy statements, and the like.]
Recommendation 20. Deans and department chairs should include resources required for effective teaching as part of set-up packages for new hires. These resources might include teaching materials (such as new technologies), time to participate in University programs for teaching effectiveness, or time to be mentored by a member of the faculty.

Recommendation 21. In addition to departmental policies and procedures (recommendations 7-12) and collegiate guidelines for promotion and tenure, each department should have clearly defined and publicized recognition criteria and procedures for outstanding teaching so that members of the department know what is expected and how procedures work.

Recommendation 22. To complement college and University-wide teaching awards, departments should establish means of publicly recognizing excellent teaching of faculty and TAs.

(* No “Recommendation 16” appeared in the original report.)

In addition to these recommendations, many of the remaining recommendations found in that document refer to changes in culture and procedures that underscore the University’s significance of teaching and, if implemented, would facilitate appropriate changes in H/P/T procedures.

HIRING CONSIDERATIONS

What weight should teaching have in hiring decisions and how should it be assessed? If teaching is to be seen as having a priority, the message needs to be clearly articulated and addressed at the start
of a faculty member’s career at the University of Minnesota. Currently, the emphasis on teaching ability, or potential, varies widely throughout the university (as, perhaps, it should). However, all tenure-track faculty hires, by definition, need to have a substantial part of their position include teaching. Therefore, the recruitment, screening, and hiring procedures need to reflect the proportion that teaching is involved in the position. In some departments, interviewees provide two presentations — the standard research-based presentation and a teaching presentation demonstrating ability within that setting. Others require submission of teaching-related materials (e.g., sample syllabi, teaching evaluations, teaching philosophy statement). Wider adoption of these approaches would help attract faculty who are serious about teaching and would shift the initial view of where teaching fits within the University’s expectations. Further, criteria for judging research are much clearer than for judging teaching potential. How that potential will be judged needs to be part of hiring process prior to advertising new positions.

As noted in Recommendation 20 from the Report of the Committee on Teaching and Learning, part of the hiring process involves a commitment from the University in the form of adequate support for teaching such as teaching start-up costs. A novice faculty member is not likely to have accumulated the tools necessary for course development. With more emphasis on technology in teaching, and more new faculty arriving ready to use such technologies, the equipment, software, and other support needs to be available. Support needs to also include funding to attend discipline-specific teaching conferences, as some colleges now provide.

Another approach by which some units have found success is in mentoring programs, such as the highly valuable Bush Early Career Faculty Program. These vary in structure, but are generally geared toward newer faculty paired with a tenured faculty member. It provides an avenue for both mentor and mentee to evaluate their teaching, discuss materials and approaches, observe teaching techniques, and, importantly, foster an understanding of how research, service, and teaching interact and the role they play in tenure and promotion. Some units have encouraged mentors and mentees to be from different disciplines in order to
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foster cross-disciplinary communication. (It needs to be noted that the mentorship model described here is not a disciplinary one, but one either applied to all new faculty or on an application basis with financial incentives for participation.)

TENURE AND PROMOTION CONSIDERATIONS

As with hiring, variations abound in how teaching is evaluated in tenure and promotion considerations across the University. Examples were provided of full and complete review of teaching materials and proficiency. Examples were also provided of instances where, explicitly, discussions on tenure or promotion were to focus solely on research. Many units require complete teaching portfolios that include teaching philosophy statements, example syllabi, exams, assignments, and student course evaluations. Other units require peer evaluations based on classroom observations. Each unit needs to establish an appropriate means of documenting and evaluating teaching. There has been movement to establish University guidelines for peer evaluation of teaching. We applaud those efforts and encourage integration and coordination of those with other discussions of post-tenure review and related issues.

Recurring themes in comments received in our discussions included an emphasis on supportive, developmental approaches to teaching evaluation. That means the goal should be to improve teaching rather than penalizing poor performers. How to balance this with the call for teaching to be considered an important measure of someone’s contribution to the University needs to be worked out. However, to overcome the resistance associated with peer review of teaching, a supportive orientation, rather than an evaluative one, is critical.

Although more difficult to quantify than number of publications or scores on student evaluations, colleagues need to be able to evaluate the quality of teaching prior to granting tenure. Bringing
teaching out in the open for peer or external review were again common themes. This is also where the impact of out-of-classroom teaching (e.g., advising, service learning, research and internship supervision, etc.) needs to be considered.

The fact that there are units within the University that ignore the tenure code and their own stated guidelines by diminishing the role of teaching in tenure and promotion discussions is reprehensible. Here is where departmental consequences for teaching effectiveness would have an impact (see Recommendation 17), both in curtailing such practices and in encouraging teaching effectiveness in units that fully recognize its contribution. Under current structures, research is rewarded at an extent that exceeds the percent of effort required of faculty. Symptomatic of this is the use of course releases as rewards for other activities. Ironically, those that have received recognition for teaching excellence are often targeted for positions or activities that result in reduced teaching loads as “compensation” or “reward.”

CONCLUSION

In closing, we wish to underscore that the intent here is not to pit teaching against research as a measurement of worth. Both are necessary to achieve the goals of the University. A possible view is that each activity is an aspect of “scholarship,” as defined by Diamond and Adams (1995). They state that scholarship includes six features:

(1) the activity requires a high level of discipline-specific expertise,
(2) the activity breaks new ground,
(3) the activity can be replicated and elaborated,
(4) the work and its results can be documented,
(5) the work and its results can be peer reviewed, and
(6) the activity has significance or impact (p. 14).

Research, as it is practiced and evaluated, easily fits these cri-
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Criteria. Teaching can as well, and models have been provided for that (Halpern et al., 1998). However, teaching needs to be more public and subject to the same forms of evaluation as our research to justify the support and rewards recommended here. Of course, it is equally true that the rewards and support are necessary to justify the effort in teaching. Hopefully the Academy can assist in promoting this process of change in thinking about teaching.

REFERENCES
