Section IV: Using Evaluation For the Improvement of Teaching

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One of the most important processes that takes place at any college or university is the evaluation of teaching. In spite of the fact that such evaluation has been done quarter after quarter, or semester after semester, for hundreds of years, we continue to search for new and better ways to relate the process to the improvement of classroom teaching. Questions are raised as to what kind of information to gather and from what sources; further, we ask how can the information be fed back to faculty so that they can use it to make changes that will make their teaching more effective. The authors of the articles in this section offer some answers to these questions that may be of use to others.

In the first article, Dee Fink provides us with a description of the evaluation process at the University of Oklahoma. He begins by offering a definition of teaching as an interactive process that involves both teacher and student. He suggests that the most appropriate type of evaluation for college and university teaching is a four dimensional model which includes teacher input, process (i.e., course decisions and classroom behavior), product (student learning) and contextual factors. He then goes on to discuss multiple sources of information that relate to each dimension. The end result is a comprehensive method for evaluation of teaching that might be transportable in part or as a whole to other institutions.

The second article of this section will be of interest to instructional
consultants who deal with the use of student evaluation of teaching. Richard Tiberius presents a case study that illustrates an excellent technique for eliciting and using oral student feedback in the evaluation of teaching. He describes a method of small group interviews with students which enables the consultant to gain greater clarity and understanding of the students' comments, and offers suggestions as to how this feedback can be conveyed to faculty in a non-threatening manner so it can be used to improve teaching.

The third article by Joyce Povlacs complements the Tiberius method in that she considers the use of students' written evaluations. She describes a three step method for gaining greater understanding of students' written comments. In the first step, she emphasizes the need to place each written comment within the context of the student's overall rating of the course and instructor. This helps to clarify specific learning problems that individual students may have had with the course and enables the consultant or teacher to make sense of seemingly contradictory comments. In the second step, she classifies student comments in relation to elements of effective teaching. This helps to identify areas of strength as well as weakness in the instructional method. Finally, she considers the relationship between students' evaluative comments about the course and their personal goals and learning needs.

Thus, the three articles take us from the general to the specific and offer some new ideas for refining the process of evaluation for the improvement of teaching.

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