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TEACHING at UNL

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA–LINCOLN
Teaching and Learning Center
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From Regard to Reward: Improving Teaching at a Research-Oriented University

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How well research universities perform their undergraduate teaching function is being widely questioned. Current issues of *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (for example, see 11/29/89 "Universities Weigh Better Thinking for Teaching Assistants") report that officials in colleges and universities are under pressure from students, parents, and legislators demanding better undergraduate teaching. A recent meeting of officials of land grant colleges pointed to undergraduate teaching as an area needing immediate attention. The latest report of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching finds that professors in American higher education feel that teaching has suffered because of emphasis on research (*New York Times,* November 6, 1989). It appears that the public, the administrators, and the professors all have their doubts about the adequacy of undergraduate teaching at universities.

Has a feeling that undergraduate teaching needs improvement reached Nebraska?

Reached Nebraska? Reached the home of the Centennial Education experiment? Of the University-wide Foundations Program? Of the ADAPT program in the College of Arts and Sciences? Of NUPAGE, the College of Agriculture curriculum renewal program? It was already here. One of the latest evidences is the FIPSE-supported project "From Regard to Reward: Improving Teaching at a Research-Oriented University," now in its first year at UNL.

Who or what is FIPSE?

1: FIPSE/fip-*see*/*n*: acronym of the Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education, a branch of the United States Department of Education. Each year it solicits proposals for doing what its name says, receives about nineteen hundred proposals, and funds fewer than one hundred. 2: FIPSE.fip-*see*/*adj*: idealistic, utopian, quixotic; characterized by an attempt to align deeds with words. *Ex*: a *FIPSE* project.

Where did this FIPSE proposal originate?

Project Co-Director Leverne Barrett, Associate Professor in Agricultural Education, first proposed the idea of a cooperative project between the College of Agriculture and the College of Arts and Sciences looking at how teaching is evaluated and rewarded in the two colleges. Bud Narveson, Professor of English, long active in the ADAPT program, was asked to serve as Co-Director for Arts and Sciences. Joyce Povlacs Lunde, then with the Teaching and Learning Center, joined them to help write the proposal to FIPSE. This first proposal was awarded a planning grant, which provided the impetus to keep revising and resubmitting the proposal until, on the third try, it was funded.

What makes this project unique?

Probably the most unusual feature of this project is the collaboration of a professional college and a liberal arts college, each with its own traditions and its own governance structure.

You conducted a survey of the two college faculties. What did you learn?

While a majority of faculty who responded reported a strong interest in teaching, not so many perceived as strong an interest on the part of the institution. Administrators to whom we showed these results expressed concern, because they do not see themselves as holding teaching in lesser regard than research. If they apparently are delivering such a message to their faculties, they are eager for us to look for ways to correct the misperception. Thus the goals of the project in this regard became two-fold: to persuade the faculty that effective teaching will be appropriately rewarded on some sort of equality with effective research, and to make sure that the process for rewarding effective teaching is in place and working.

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For more information about this FIPSE project, please contact Leverne Barrett, Associate Professor in Agricultural Education (472-2807) or Robert (Bud) Narveson, Professor in English (472-1808).

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How was the proposal developed?

In developing our successful proposal we consulted with like-minded faculty members and administrators who met with us in planning seminars. With their advice, we consulted with their departmental chairs and heads and arrived at the group of four departments, two from each college, that became the pilot departments for the first year of the project. We were pleased to find two large departments to work with—Agronomy and English—and two smaller departments—Psychology and Agricultural Education. It is not wholly accidental that two of these are the departmental homes of the project co-directors.

What is the role of the pilot departments?

Each of the pilot departments is at work defining its teaching goals, devising ways of identifying and collecting information that reveals how well its goals are being met by individual teachers, and deciding how the promotion, tenure, and merit policies of the department will be used to provide incentives and rewards to those who successfully and appropriately further the departmental goals. Besides refining and improving the evaluation and reward systems in their departments according to their own needs and desires, they are writing descriptions of their plans that others may consult and adopt or modify and that administrators may use in adjusting their policies and practices for rewarding teaching.

How is the project assisting the pilot departments?

The project directors have been working with each of these departments to develop independent departmental plans. Leadership in developing each departmental plan was assumed by committees in each department made up of the departmental head or chair, a member or recent member of the personnel committee, and a faculty member selected in consultation with the head or chair to serve as project coordinator. The coordinators from the four departments get together with us on an occasional basis to share progress reports and to discuss common problems. We as project leaders have been identifying useful resource materials and supplying them to the departments. We also coordinate inter-departmental collaboration and liaison with the college and university administrators.

What obstacles have the departmental committees encountered?

Besides devising a plan, each department committee faced the problem of making the plan acceptable to the members of their department. What makes this a problem?

A. Some think good teaching cannot be defined.
B. Some think good teaching cannot be measured.
C. Some think student evaluations are untrustworthy.
D. Some think measuring teaching will be a lot of work added onto the work we already have.
E. Some think that even if better evaluations are made, nothing will change.

This is a far from complete list of legitimate concerns to be dealth with.

How does one deal with these kind of concerns?

Where information is faulty, we supply people with information about what the most knowledgeable literature shows. We supply opportunities for them to talk about their doubts and fears. We solicit and pay attention to their opinions. We point out that evaluations will be made either well or badly, but they will be made, and therefore they may as well have a hand in deciding how they will be made. We suggest that what they learn in the evaluation process will be valuable to them in their own teaching. We point to the good intentions of the administration. Your further ideas are invited.

How do you respond to faculty suspicions of student evaluations?

One response is to admit their partial validity. Judgment of faculty performance must not rely solely on student evaluation. One goal of the project is to establish a broader base for evaluation of teaching performance. In addition to using student evaluations, self-evaluations and peer evaluations can be employed. What happens in the classroom is only one part of the total performance. Peers are the best judges of the preparation of materials including syllabi, readings, handouts and tests, of conferences, of comments on written work, of grading practices, of scholarly preparation. The ways teachers share their experience and expertise with others must also be assessed and valued. Ways can be devised to document all such activities. A currently popular source of evaluative evidence is the teaching portfolio, modeled after the portfolios assembled by creative artists and performers to display their achievements.

Can you really distinguish between evaluation for improvements and evaluation for reward?

Expert opinion generally holds that two sorts of assessment must be kept separate even while they are inseparably intertwined. From the beginning, the project directors have discovered the difficulty of doing this. Professors who are not outstanding teachers would have little incentive to supply assessment data if the consequence were merely the greater reward of those who are already outstanding. Professors must know that the data they supply will also be of use to them in improving their own performance. The institution must be willing to put the requisite amount of resources into assistance for teachers desiring to improve as well as into rewards to achieve excellence in teaching. Furthermore, the whole enterprise will be pointless unless the consequence of rewarding and promoting excellence is improved student learning. And how does one demonstrate that student learning has improved?

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Assuming you solve the data-collection problem, does that solve the problem of rewarding effective teaching?

There's the rub. No, it does not. The point is not simply to reward effective teaching, but to bring about more of it. What motivates teachers not only to teach well but to devote the time and energy needed for improving their performance? As important as monetary reward to most of us, for example, is recognition. When you read daily about Professor X's or Professor Y's research, but rarely about their teaching, it is not hard to figure out which activity they will regard as important. If years of outstanding teaching were to bring only a medal and a one-time cash award, whereas research brings a salary increase that continues year after year, the message to the faculty would be clear. If faculty leaves go only to researchers, the message is clear. Not simply how to reward teaching, but how best to reward teaching to bring about improved teaching is the important question. Basic to improving teaching is enhancing in every way possible the recognition of effort devoted to improving teaching.

What will happen in successive years of the project?

In the second year, a second group of departments will become involved with the project. They'll either volunteer or be invited. They'll be able to work from the plans put together by the first four pilot departments. They'll be paired with the pilot departments and get help from the companies in those departments. The pilot departments will continue to modify their plans in the light of experience.

What implications does the project have for colleges other than Agriculture and Arts & Sciences?

People in many colleges have been asking whether they will benefit from the project. We assume that what the Colleges of Agriculture and Arts & Sciences learn about designing and operating plans that distinguish and reward excellent teaching will prove helpful to the University as a whole. Each of the departments included in the project over the next three years will have developed a plan that may serve as a model to other departments and colleges, and will have individuals in it who will be valuable resource persons to whom other departments and colleges may turn for advice on how to win faculty acceptance of plans of their own.

Can my college and department participate in the project?

Departments in Agriculture and Arts & Sciences will be added to the project at intervals over the next three years. Which ones are added when will depend on the interest of faculty members in the departments and on involving a wide variety of disciplines. We will also be happy to discuss involving other colleges. If you are interested, by all means contact one of us.

What can the administration do to win the confidence of the faculty that it is willing and able to recognize and reward effective teaching?

When departments, on the initiative of their faculties, take steps to improve the evaluation and reward of their teaching, college and university administrators can support their actions. One thing the administration at each level must do is to help remove obstacles to effective teaching. These obstacles may be policies that differentially reward better than teaching. They may be inadequate teaching conditions, such as lack of equipment or convenient space. They may be inadequate funding of assistance to teachers with problems. They may be inadequate funding for faculty development leaves and instructional development projects. To discuss such concerns, a second portion of the project has a leadership team made up of administrators from every level in the university identifying problems and proposing solutions.

What do you see as potential benefits to the faculty members?

- Insight into teaching strengths and weaknesses.
- Incentive to undertake improvement activities.
- Improved merit ratings.
- Improved tenure and promotion files.
- Improved time management skills.
- Improved classroom skills.
- More material support from department.

What do you see as potential benefits to departmental administrators?

- Improved insight into their faculty's teaching activities.
- Better data to support merit, tenure, and promotion.
- Improved departmental performance in teaching.
- Greater total effort given to effective teaching.
- More resource support from college.
- Better sense of what is needed to improve departmental performance.

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Resource Books on Renewing and Evaluating Teaching

The Teaching and Learning Center has a variety of printed materials on the topic of evaluating and improving instruction that can be loaned to faculty members.

Titles Include:

Aleamoni, L. M. [1987] Techniques for Evaluating and Improving Instruction. *New Directions For Teaching and Learning.* 31. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Andrews, H. A. [1985] *Evaluating For Excellence.* Stillwater, OK: New Forums Press.

Baldwin, R. J. (Ed.) [1989] *Incentives for Faculty Vitality. New Directions for Higher Education.* 51. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Braskamp, L.A.; D. C. Brandenburg; and J. C. Ary. [1984] *Evaluating Teaching Effectiveness.* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.

Centra, J. A. (Ed.) [1977] Renewing and Evaluating Teaching. *New Directions for Higher Education.* 17. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Cochran, L. H. [1989] *Administrative Commitment to Teaching.* Cope Girardeau, MO: Step Up.

French-Lazovik, G. (Ed.) [1982] Practices That Improve Teaching Evaluation. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning.* 6. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Knapper, C. K.; G. L. Geis; C. E. Pascal; and B. M. Shore (Ed.) [1977] *If Teaching Is Important . . . The Evaluation of Instruction in Higher Educaton.*

Millman, J. (Ed.) [1981] *Handbook of Teacher Evaluation.* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.

Stanley, S. J. and W. J. Popham (Ed.) [1988] *Teacher Evaluation: Six Prescriptions for Success.* Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Faculty are encouraged to come and browse in our Resource Room, 104 Benton Hall, City Campus.

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David Lewis	Agronomy	2-1570
Lowell Moser	Agronomy	2-1558
Frederick Link	Chair, English	2-1837
Leslie Whipp	English	2-1833
George Wolf	English	2-1845
John Berman	Chair, Psychology	2-3110
Daniel Bernstein	Psychology	2-3786
Calvin Garbin	Psychology	2-3122

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What do you see as potential benefits to college and university administrators?

- Greater confidence in recommendations of chairs.
- Better basis for rewarding desired performance.
- Better basis for asking for support resources from legislature.
- Better public image.

Will the project really change anything? How will you know if it does?

That, of course, remains to be seen. We are laying the groundwork for measuring change. We have devised a questionnaire that assesses opinions of faculty members about evaluation and reward of teaching. Members of the four pilot departments have been asked to fill out this questionnaire. A closer look is being taken at teaching practices of a select group of teachers in these departments. In addition, we will try to measure changes in student perceptions of teaching performance. Students in randomly selected classes will be asked to complete a questionnaire surveying their perceptions. In the last year of the project, the same kinds of assessments will be made, and the results compared with the earlier assessments. We don't have a lot of confidence that differences will be easy to measure, but one has to try.

What will satisfy FIPSE that the project has succeeded?

FIPSE will not be satisfied unless UNL is able to produce a documented process that can be employed by all colleges and departments in the university with favorable results, and be useful to other institutions as well. The project directors are therefore expending considerable energy in documenting each step in the development of evaluation and reward plans in each department and in each administrative unit at every level. Our intention is that the final report will explain not only the provisions of the plan and its operation, but also the steps for putting the plan into place.

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