

Teaching Excellence Initiatives (TEI)
Academic Planning Committee, Faculty Senate 2010-2011
University of Denver

Summary

During the 2010-2011 year, the Academic Planning Committee was asked to build upon the outcomes of the 2005 Teaching Task Force, and to recommend specific avenues for enriching the culture of teaching and consequent student learning on our campus. As a result, our committee has identified five Teaching Excellence Initiatives (TEI) that suggest steps we can take as individuals, departments, and as a University community to support excellence in teaching at DU. We hope the University community will consider, respond to, and join us in making these recommendations real. The initiatives seek to acknowledge and build upon the excellent pedagogies and practices already present on our campus, as well as offer opportunities for faculty development, inviting (rather than mandating) our colleagues from across the University to participate in the following:

New Faculty Teaching Development Initiative

A more cohesive set of resources and guidelines is needed to support new faculty members as they transition into teaching at DU. This initiative proposes guidelines for course releases and limits on teaching preps, so that new faculty can focus their energies on teaching a select number of courses well. It also calls for mentoring and training, as well as specific criteria for “teaching excellence,” in relation to promotion and tenure.

Evaluation of Teaching Initiative

In order to support robust, meaningful, and fair evaluation of teaching, faculty members need more than the data gathered from student course evaluations. This initiative recommends that DU faculty members receive multiple forms of evaluation qualitative feedback on their teaching; and it provides an array of options for gathering this feedback, including tools necessary for implementing peer-to-peer teaching reviews.

University Teaching Fellows and Associates Initiative

Both to recognize master teachers on our campus, and to benefit from their expertise, this initiative proposes the funding of up to 5 two-year University Teaching fellows, who would foster a culture of excellence in teaching by leading seminars, mentoring individual faculty members, working closely with Teaching Associates, and developing teaching materials, resources, and programs to benefit student learning throughout the campus.

Departmental Excellence in Teaching Initiative

There is much to be learned within our own departments and disciplines regarding teaching methods that best fit our and our students’ needs. To develop a more focused conversation on teaching and student learning within the disciplines, we propose funding up to three departmental teaching-focused pilot programs, in which an entire department works together to improve teaching and learning effectiveness—with support from campus resources and visiting experts in their field.

Award for Departmental Excellence in Teaching

In recognition of departments that currently demonstrate excellence in teaching, we recommend an annual award be instituted to celebrate one department’s contributions to the culture of excellence in teaching at DU each year.

Teaching Excellence Initiative (TEI) Introduction

We are committed to excellent teaching and excellent scholarship, and at DU we recognize that excellent teaching is informed by excellent scholarship. We understand that professors, from year to year and over the course of their careers, will balance their commitments to, and time investments in, these equally important enterprises in different ways.

Self-reflection about teaching, coupled with professional development opportunities and institutional supports, improves teaching. This can be documented and evaluated.

(Teaching Task Force Report, 2005)

In 2005, then Provost Robert Coombe, constituted a Teaching Task Force (TTF) to “develop and recommend a more comprehensive and coherent system for developing, supporting and evaluating teaching at the University of Denver.” The June 2005 TTF Report provided an excellent summary of university support systems for teaching with recommendations for the future.

The TTF 2005 Report demonstrates that we clearly understand the critical role of teaching, the intersections of excellence in research and scholarship that inform it, and what excellent teaching means for the health of our institution. In order to carry this vision forward, the APC has identified five Teaching Excellence Initiatives (TEI) that are asset based and offer a multi-dimensional approach for continuous improvement to any faculty member.

In recognition of our purpose to create a university-wide learning culture based on teaching excellence, we want to promote a self-selected, self-motivated and self-paced approach for individuals and departments that capitalizes first on our collective pedagogical expertise and innovation, and second, on the best resources appropriate to identified goals. This brief proposal is meant to move us to action by selecting a few notable, operational areas from the TTF Report, building action steps that will facilitate our aspirations towards excellence in teaching and learning. In offering the following brief descriptions of each Initiative, we particularly want to re-affirm an important perspective articulated in the 2005 Teaching Task Force Report:

We believe that teaching excellence takes many forms; that there are many roads to enhanced teaching effectiveness and student learning. We decline to seek to set a standard for excellent teaching, preferring to focus on exposing faculty to diverse sets of teaching skills and on supporting, evaluating and rewarding their commitment to self-reflective teaching and continuous development. We are committed to a culture that supports continuous innovation in teaching practices and in incorporation of new, important content (TTF, p. 5).

New Faculty Teaching Development Initiative

Purpose

The 2005 TTF Report included a number of suggestions about how to mentor new faculty in teaching. Greater attention to teaching as new faculty begin will contribute to a culture of excellence in teaching at DU. Although this is posed as a teaching and student learning issue, it has direct implications on research and scholarly efforts as well as the promotion and tenure process.

Implementation

Allowing new faculty time to acclimate and to hone course materials and teaching methods for a discrete number of courses will foster excellence in their teaching. From the TTF Report, the following suggestions are of particular merit:

- **Course Relief:** In departments where this is not already common practice, new faculty should have course relief from the department's normal load in the first year. Although the TTF did not specify a reduction, we would suggest 2 courses off a department's normal load in the first year. This is consistent with the policies of other universities, including the University of California at Santa Cruz and University of California Irvine, George Washington University, and the University of Pittsburg.
- **New Course Prep Limits:** The task force also suggested that new course preparations be limited to a fixed number prior to a new faculty member's tenure review. We would suggest new preps be limited to five, and that new preps, to the extent they are required, be phased in over time. Again this is consistent with policies of other universities, such as the University of Colorado Boulder in lieu of course relief.

Providing mentoring and training for new faculty promotes a culture of teaching excellence on campus, allows new faculty to connect with colleagues, and supports their individual development as teachers:

- **CTL New Faculty Training:** New faculty should be encouraged, and enabled, to attend the CTL New Faculty Workshops. While these workshops have been eliminated some years or shortened in others, we recommend a small committee of recently hired faculty with a few seasoned faculty give advice to CTL in restoring an approach for the future that can be successful for all.
- **Department New Faculty Training:** Each unit that doesn't have a new faculty training program in place should introduce mentoring in teaching. Senior faculty should review syllabi, sit in on new faculty courses and open up their own courses for new faculty observation. Particularly in a faculty member's first year, a dialogue around pedagogy and methods that do and do not work in a particular unit would contribute to excellence in teaching.

What constitutes "teaching excellence"? New and continuing faculty want to know, as this has direct impact on student learning, the success of their courses, and on their review for promotion.

- **ATP Guidelines:** In connection with the current revision of the ATP guidelines, very specific criteria should be established in "teaching excellence" that are then used in making tenure and promotion decisions. Multiple modes of input ought to be identified to inform this evaluation and steps taken to bring out the best of the new faculty member over time through training and/or mentoring that is valued and evaluated for promotion.

Outcomes:

During the quarter, new faculty will make use of Classroom Assessment Techniques, or "CATs," for real-time evaluation of student learning and engagement (see <http://www.du.edu/assessment/aboutassessment.html>). At the end of the quarter, the new faculty member will complete a self reflection report that includes student learning goals, artifacts of learning outcomes, feedback from students and mentor faculty, and an assessment of syllabi. Clear competencies will be articulated and assessed to determine goals for the following year.

Cost: this is born by unit or department.

Evaluation of Teaching Initiative

Purpose

Our suggestions concern two types of evaluation: summative (undertaken for the purposes of promotion) and formative (undertaken for professional development). The TTF Report (2005) emphasizes the importance of excellence in teaching for promotion and tenure, identifies the limitations of current student evaluations, and suggests that “a well-designed teaching evaluation program must include an equally broad spectrum of performance measures that will fairly reflect the individual’s contributions and achievements”—calling for improved forms of summative evaluation (p. 4). The APC committee recommends that instruments used for summative evaluation (such as student evaluations) be made more robust and also that practices for formative evaluation, including peer review, be fostered across the university.

The APC committee identified three priorities regarding the evaluation of teaching: faculty members need more meaningful feedback on their teaching, peer collaboration around teaching is a largely untapped resource on our campus, and the design of our standard evaluation instrument may need to be revisited. These priorities are in keeping with a similar initiative at Cornell University (<http://www.cte.cornell.edu/resources/teh/teh.html>).

Priority 1: Meaningful Qualitative Feedback. Our current teaching evaluations are used for both summative and formative purposes, as well as enfranchising students as they select and respond to their classes. However, end-of-quarter student evaluations fail to satisfy many of our teaching goals; and such feedback often constitutes the primary or only reflection of faculty teaching. In order for the robust, meaningful, and fair evaluation of teaching (both summative and formative), more venues than presently collected from basic student evaluations are needed. For faculty members to engage with and learn from the feedback they receive, and for their teaching merit to be understood more holistically, we propose the following:

Priority 1: Implementation. All academic units should develop the practice of incorporating at least one source of qualitative feedback into the evaluation of teaching. Forms this qualitative feedback might take are given in the APT document (4.3.2); what remains is for departments (or units) to choose and implement at least one of these, if they are not already doing so:

Self Review

- Self-analysis, including written reflection on course goals, strengths and areas for further development, or
- Evidence of innovative approaches to teaching (in method or content), as well as extra efforts in developing new courses or laboratories, or
- Evidence of efforts to improve teaching effectiveness (attendance at appropriate programs, taping or filming class sessions for analysis, and the like), or

Review of artifacts from students and alumni

- Review of scholarly and/or creative work produced by students (e.g., theses) and recognition of students' work (e.g., prizes or awards won), or
- Written feedback by students and/or alumni, or

Peer Review

- Review of documents reflecting course organization (e.g., course outlines, reading lists, statements regarding the basis on which grades will be given, and the like), or
- Descriptive or evaluative letter(s) written by a colleague, reflecting upon a class visit or review of course materials.

Priority 1: Outcomes. Receiving qualitative feedback and acting upon it will allow faculty members to enhance student learning and the effectiveness of their teaching. Faculty members will make changes to course

documents and classroom practice in keeping with this feedback. They will also be better positioned to identify what campus resources can help them strengthen their teaching further.

Priority 1: Costs. Faculty time.

Priority 2: Formative Peer Teaching Reviews. Excellence in teaching combined with faculty scholarship is the core of any quality academic institution. The APC committee recommends that faculty be given ample opportunities to benefit from formative evaluation before undergoing summative evaluation, and that peer observation and review be made part of formative evaluation practices. While many faculty recognize the benefits of peer-to-peer collaboration on course and assignment design and reflection on classroom practice, going about gathering peer responses to one’s teaching can be challenging. In order to foster such collaboration, the APC recommends development of a campus-wide voluntary network for peer-to-peer formative evaluation. While we do not seek to require peer review as a part of the evaluation of teaching at DU, we want to facilitate its practice.

Priority 2: Implementation. We suggest creating a campus-wide networking tool for bringing together faculty interested in receiving and giving voluntary formative peer-to-peer evaluation. The TTF Report identifies three primary dimensions of teaching: classroom teaching, mentoring, and outreach activities (p. 5). To facilitate the work of peer-to-peer observes, and to help peer evaluators effectively and consistently measure excellence in teaching we have developed this peer teaching evaluation rubric, which can be adapted for any of the three dimensions outlined by the TTF as well as for reflecting on inclusive excellence. This is just one of many ways of capturing this information. We recommend soliciting feedback from at least two peer reviewers, one within the faculty member’s disciplinary area and one outside the disciplinary area.

Name of Faculty Member:	Date:	
Academic Discipline:		
Course Title/Mentoring Activity/Outreach Activity:		
Date of Observation:		
Peer Reviewer(s):		
For each of these items, please rate the faculty member on a scale of 1 to 4 (0 = not applicable):		
4 = Excellent: all criteria are met and executed in an excellent manner		
3 = Good: all criteria are met and executed in an acceptable way, but some criteria could be improved in a few important ways		
2 = Needs Improvement: some criteria are minimally met but not sufficiently executed		
1 = Inadequate: some criteria are not met and some criteria are not executed in an effective manner		
0 = Not Applicable		
<i>Peer Teaching Evaluation</i>		
Area	Assessment Item	Score
Content I.	Lecture topic(s) and/or discussion are relevant to student learning outcomes.	

Content II.	Content is relevant; the latest theories and practices are present.	
Content III.	Content is supported and illustrated appropriately: includes research and/or evidence-based practices; includes external sources where needed.	
Area	Assessment Item	Score
Delivery I.	Demonstrates inclusive excellence in the classroom: offers multiple perspectives and challenges student stereotypes, biases, or assumptions. Manages/facilitates the classroom discussion effectively; welcomes discourse and fosters student engagement.	
Delivery II.	Organization of course and lectures is well presented and defined. Delivery and chosen pedagogy are appropriate for and supportive of the content.	
Delivery III.	Effectively uses innovative approaches and demonstrates/incorporates technological tools and applications.	

Mentoring I.	Actively mentors or advises students and colleagues; serves on dissertation or thesis committees, serves as a mentor to new faculty, supervises research or independent studies.	
Outreach Activities II.	Participates in other teaching or teaching-related opportunities outside of normal course assignments.	

TOTAL SCORE _____
Recommendations:
Next Steps:
Reviewer's Comments:
Faculty Member's Comments:

Priority 2: Outcomes. See above.

Priority 2: Costs. Faculty time.

Priority 3: A Framework for Summative Evaluation. While the 2004 Provost's conference called for greater uniformity across DU in the forms of evaluation used, we feel uniformity is less important than the richness of the data collected. Our call for a more qualitative approach responds to this. Also, current scholarship suggests that the relevance of data collected by end-of-quarter surveys varies greatly, both in terms of reliability and validity, based on the instrument's design (Maki, 2004; Davis, 1993; Arreola, 2007).

Priority 3: Implementation. We would encourage the Provost to make resources available for the review, and, as necessary, revision of the evaluation instruments used within individual units, in response to this scholarship and expertise.

Priority 3: Outcomes. A framework for evaluation that will provide more reliable and relevant feedback on what does and does not work in the classroom. Clarity in learning outcomes for students with a tie to pedagogical approaches supportive of those goals will provide focus for teaching improvement. And tenure and promotion decisions that are based upon a more robust set of data, that will position reviewers to give faculty under review constructive and useful feedback.

Priority 3: Cost. To be born by the office of the Provost.

University Teaching Fellows and Associates Initiative

Purpose

The University Teaching Fellows program creates an opportunity to recognize and benefit from the expertise of our own DU master teachers and to offer individual faculty the opportunity to work one-on-one and in small groups to enhance specific aspects of their teaching practices. Similar programs exist across the country, such as at Vanderbilt and the University of Southern California, where the insight and experience of teachers, well-recognized by their peers, is drawn upon in collaboration with associates who are interested in gaining the support and structure to focus on innovation in teaching and learning. Learning communities of faculty at the University of Minnesota have also formed around interest groups to create a synergistic exchange of best practices in teaching coupled with research focused on evidence-based pedagogy. As Arreola (2007) notes, multiple assumptions exist about what constitutes excellence in teaching; so gathering a diverse group of fellows who can provide multiple pedagogical approaches that will more adequately address the diverse needs of the student learning community is paramount. Our own Morgridge Teaching and Technology Fellows program provides a useful model and confirms the positive role peer-mentors can have on faculty learning.

Implementation

University Teaching Fellows will be sought from a broad range of disciplines, and will draw primarily on the expertise of tenured faculty and experienced non-tenure line faculty. Up to five appointments will be made that last two years each. A stipend will be offered to provide incentive and recognition for their expertise and time.

Responsibilities: During the first year of this program, faculty fellows will develop the vision and measurable outcomes to establish this new program of peer mentoring. A minimum of 4 topical teaching seminars would be offered by the Fellows for Associates and others throughout the university. In addition, faculty will mentor Associates on an individual basis for services such as developing student learning outcomes, in-class observations, syllabi review, class preparation and pedagogical guidance. The application process will include a cover letter of intent, teaching evaluations for several previous years, a letter from the chair, sample syllabi and supporting documents. Fellows may be asked to sit on the committee to select the Departmental Excellence in Teaching Award.

Outcomes for Teaching Fellows.

Learning objects or assets will be created by the fellows each year, based on their expertise and discipline of focus. Web resources, a teaching symposium, and/or curriculum development in a particular college could all form substantive outcomes each year.

Cost for Teaching Fellows. Yearly Stipend.

Implementation for Fellowship Teaching Associates.

Up to 20 Fellowship Teaching Associates will be selected annually to work with the University Teaching Fellows over a one-year period to improve their teaching and focus on student learning. Fellowship Teaching Associates will engage in a minimum of 3 University Teaching Fellowship seminars, work closely on a project with a Teaching Fellow, create and implement a reflective feedback process utilizing multiple data points on teaching and learning in their courses, and produce a tangible document related to the learning experience that will create action and sustainability.

Outcomes: Reflection on and documentation of learning. Associates will produce learning assets or objects that create actionable tools or approaches to teaching and learning in the classroom. These could be shared with the wider community via a dedicated Portfolio site.

Cost: Small stipends for participating faculty Associates. Faculty time.

Teaching Excellence in Departments Initiative

Purpose

Creating and sustaining a culture of excellence in teaching must involve our colleagues. We spend most of our time in our professional worlds at DU in our departments. Knowing the best ways to teach and stimulate learning within our discipline is best shared in our departments but often taken for granted or overlooked given the competing demands on our scholarly lives. What's more, many of the current Center for Teaching and Learning programs that serve the entire university faculty rightly capitalize on the interdisciplinary sharing of lessons learned in our teaching. Yet we believe there is much to be learned within our own departments and disciplines regarding teaching methodologies and approaches that best fit our teaching needs. To develop a more focused conversation and attention to the discipline, we propose three departmental teaching-focused learning communities where the entire department agrees to challenge themselves over a set period of time to improve teaching and learning effectiveness. This initiative is meant to deepen the sharing of best practices and setting of goals to improve in a department that is courageous to openly discuss their teaching together.

Implementation

Faculty directed: Faculty members, in conversation with CTL and the Director of Assessment, will create a department-wide evaluation and strategy to reach goals to personally develop each faculty member and the team as a whole.

Grant Based Initiative: 3 pilot Departmental TEI Grants awarded, all faculty members must agree to be engaged and willing to participate in this departmental initiative.

Collaborative Goal Setting: Together, faculty will create goals and strategies for sustaining, and improving strengths and addressing challenges identified.

Implementation Phase: Departments will set reasonable timelines for implementation of strategies with an understanding that continuous improvement takes time but is spurred along with milestones and evaluations.

Outcomes

Evaluation period: Departments will participate in a teaching/learning self study, inviting students, alumni and outside experts as appropriate, to identify their current strengths and challenges in teaching and learning.

Continuous Evaluation: Built into the goals and strategy of each initiative is a self-paced timeline for evaluation and dissemination of learning.

Teaching Colloquium: All 3 TEI Grant units will share findings from their evaluation, goal setting and implementation with the rest of the campus community through periodic teaching colloquia.

Cost: To be determined by the Provost.

Award for Departmental Excellence in Teaching

Purpose

Each year, the University will honor one department for their commitment to excellence in teaching. The award will be presented at the Pioneer's Awards Ceremony highlighting the University's investment in a culture of teaching excellence.

Implementation

Departments can submit self-nominations, or outside faculty may nominate a department for this award. Nominations will be reviewed by a committee that includes the current University Teaching Fellows. Criteria for evaluation will include: a reflection on the department's course goals and learning outcomes for courses taught within and outside of their major; a portfolio of materials that demonstrate pedagogical approaches and innovations being used within the department; a statement of campus impact—how has this department used teaching to enrich the intellectual culture of our campus within and outside of the classroom?; and a record of faculty members' participation in teaching-related professional development (participation in on-campus and off-campus events that emphasize pedagogy).

Outcomes

This award will raise the profile of departments on our campus that are actively contributing the culture of excellence in teaching.

Cost

The award will offer a stipend to be used for a beginning-of-the-year faculty meeting, to discuss teaching plans and practices for the coming year.