


MEMORANDUM

June 1, 1978

TO: George T. Matthews
Chairperson, University Senate Steering Committee

FROM: Lewis N. Pino 
Director, Research and Instructional Services

and Richard P. Tucker
Chairperson, University Teaching and Learning Committee

SUBJECT: Teaching and Learning Committee Activities, 1977-78

First of all, we would like to commend the members of the Teaching and Learning Committee for their interest, involvement, and energy. We've had a good committee this year, and it has worked hard.

For the record, the members of the 1977-78 Committee are:

Rosalind Andreas, Max Brill, Clark Heston, Carol Johnson, Margaret Kurzman, Charles Lindemann, Mary Otto, Lewis Pino, Kathleen Randolph, Joann Russell, Richard Tucker, Donald Warren, and Robert Williamson.

Teaching Effectiveness Study

This year saw the completion of a study begun four years ago on student perceptions of teaching effectiveness. The Lilliston Report, prepared at the direction of the University Senate, was filed with the Steering Committee in October 1977, and a detailed history of this effort--plus the Teaching and Learning Committee's analysis of this work--was sent to the Provost on March 2, 1978. (The latter report is herewith appended.) We believe that student perceptions of teaching effectiveness are important, but that quantified data on student perceptions should be only one element of a wider system of gathering insights into teaching performance.

Supporting the Improvement of Teaching

Further, we are convinced that the University could do a good deal to assist individual instructors in analyzing and responding to critiques of teaching performance. One of our major objectives is to press for an increase in support services available for faculty seeking to evaluate and improve their effectiveness as teachers. Models for this service are in operation on various other campuses which the Committee has been studying for several years. We hope that decisive action in this area will be taken within the coming year or two.

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Departmental Study Grants

On October 7th, the Teaching and Learning Committee invited the faculty and staff to hear reports from those who received Departmental Study grants in 1976-77. Representatives of Kresge Library and the Departments of Political Science and Chemistry reported on the results of their travels and the efforts currently underway to improve instruction in each of these units. While attendance was lower than expected, the discussion was lively and productive.

Also in October, the Committee accepted for review six additional Departmental Study proposals, and after careful consideration made awards to Communication Arts, Learning Skills, and Physics for costs of travel, to be carried out during the spring and summer of 1978.

This two-year experiment in support of departmental improvement efforts has convinced us that the basis of our Educational Development Fund thinking is sound. With the encouragement of the Provost we issued, this spring, a call for EDF proposals for the 1978-79 year. Included this time is an Academic Audit grant program to provide support for consultants to units not yet ready for the Departmental Study grant step.

The Committee continued its search for both internal and external funding to expand the EDF effort. In January, Messrs. Obear, Pino, and Tucker journeyed through ice and snow to call on the Eli Lilly Foundation in Indianapolis. Laura Bornholdt, Vice President of Eli Lilly, was most cordial, but we departed with nothing more than advice. Lilly's funds for curriculum innovation have been severely restricted; they were not prepared to consider any formal proposal from us. Our experience there is probably indicative of generally bleak prospects for outside funding.

Employers Survey

Under the joint auspices of the Teaching and Learning Committee and the University Planning Committee, Donald Warren and his associates are well into a survey of the employers of Oakland University graduates. At a February meeting of the Committee, Mr. Warren gave us some preliminary analyses of the results of interviews with sixty area employers of Oakland graduates. It is anticipated that this study will soon be available in final form.

Audio-Visual Workshop

On November 18, the Teaching and Learning Committee acted as host for a workshop on the use of audio-visual means in instruction. Tom Lyons and his staff carried the responsibility for this useful event.

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Outstanding Teacher Award

Finally, materials on procedures and practices for rewarding excellence in teaching, used by other institutions, were examined carefully during the year by a T/L subcommittee led by Ms. Kurzman, with the assistance of Ms. Randolph and Messrs. Brieger and Heston. That subcommittee filed a preliminary report on March 29 and, after detailed discussion within the Committee, retired to prepare a second draft for final action in September.

Future Objectives

During May, Messrs. Heston, Pino, and Tucker met with representatives of departments, interdisciplinary concentrations, and other academic units for discussions on two concentric issues: the usefulness of the Departmental Study grants, and the directions which the Committee should take in the future in order to serve the University more broadly. We found broad and firm support for expansion of the Committee's work in several areas. These perspectives are included in the following list of major issues which the Committee now hopes to address in the coming year.

1. On May 24 we established a new subcommittee, chaired by Stephen Miller, to survey faculty and student opinion and identify easily correctible hindrances to effective teaching and learning. Many items on our preliminary list involve suggestions for more effective use of the physical plant. The subcommittee will shape its mandate and procedures more precisely by September.
2. The problem of students whose learning skills are not at college level (in reading, writing, and mathematical skills) remains pervasive. Many departmental representatives commented on elements of this. The Committee includes specialists in some of these areas; the Committee may find ways of working more effectively here.
3. There is an urgent need for more administrative support and coordination for interdisciplinary programs. This too is a complex issue, but one thing clear is that the University must provide more effective support if we expect to encourage students to integrate their studies across departmental lines.
4. There has been considerable discussion concerning the status of General Education requirements in colleges outside Arts and Sciences. The Committee as yet has no clear sense of its direction in this.
5. For purposes of publicizing Teaching and Learning issues around the faculty and staff, the Committee hopes for the coming year to revive the old T & L Notes in some form.

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6. We have begun discussions on the issue of mid-career faculty development. This is a multi-faceted issue which the University, like the profession at large, must address with increasing emphasis and imagination in the future. One aspect, a suggestion which has arisen frequently of late, is already being drafted in detail: a proposal to include in the Educational Development Fund grants to individual instructors or small teams to construct new courses which require more elaborate retooling than the usual syllabus revisions. This would apply especially to circumstances in which academic programs resolve to fill serious gaps in the curriculum and faculty members wish to extend their competences into those areas, beyond their previous range. There is as yet not adequate support for this type of work at the University; it is overdue.

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MEMORANDUM

March 2, 1978

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TO: Frederick W. Obear
 Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost

FROM: Richard Tucker *RT*
 Chairman, Teaching and Learning Committee

SUBJECT: T/L Committee's Analyses of Student Evaluations of Teaching

For the past four years the Teaching and Learning Committee has been studying ways in which Oakland University can best obtain systematic data on students' evaluation of faculty. This process was initiated by the Board of Trustees' resolution that reappointment, promotion, and tenure recommendations must include evidence of student perception of teaching effectiveness. Acting on that directive, the Provost informally asked the T/L Committee in December 1973 to study how this could best be done. His memorandum to the Committee, Dated October 15, 1975, stated most explicitly the assumptions behind that request.

It was the Board's assumption that this information would only be one among several items of assessment of teaching effectiveness; colleague evaluation and individual statements of teaching goals and objectives are examples of other important data. Currently, the procedures in effect for assessing student perception of teaching effectiveness vary widely and the Provost's Personnel Committee and perhaps other faculty review groups feel the need for a standardized and at least partially uniform procedure. I hope your Committee can explore this problem.

The present memorandum summarizes the history of the Committee's work on that project, and then presents our conclusions about teaching evaluation within the context of our present and projected role in the university.

I. The History of the Study

In a meeting with Professor Ralph Schillace, then chairman of Teaching and Learning, in December 1973, the Provost requested that the Committee study how the University could best systematize the collection of student evaluations of teaching. Professor Schillace reported the request to the Committee on December 18, 1973, and shortly thereafter established a subcommittee to begin work. The Committee's annual report for 73-74 defined the task as follows:

We are especially interested in how the information collected on effective teaching by departments is used to reinforce the teaching practices of individual faculty members and how such information is used in tenure and promotion decisions.

On May 10, 1974 Professor Schillace, in a memorandum to all chairpersons and deans, requested that they inform the Committee as to which procedures

their units used for evaluation of teaching, and how the information was used to improve teaching effectiveness. "We hope to use (these data) as a guide in the development of support services for the very important activity of assessing teaching and providing feedback to faculty." At this first stage the survey had several inter-related purposes, including both assessment of teaching for contract evaluation and diagnosis for the instructor's own efforts to improve. The survey was also broadly defined, asking not only for students' evaluations but also for units' methods of gathering colleague assessments and other elements of teaching evaluation.

The response to the Committee's memorandum was only partial. Hence in February 1975, when the Arts and Sciences Committee on Appointments and Promotions requested similar assistance from the Committee, a subcommittee was established, and chaired by Professor Richard Burke. On February 13, Burke asked all chairpersons for their methods of teaching evaluation for the express purpose of studying how we might standardize the evaluation of teaching to a greater extent. Later that spring the Burke subcommittee submitted a report to the full Committee, which tentatively recommended

that all departments in the university adopt a common core of student questionnaire items, while retaining variation in other items from one department to another and even (if possible) from one instructor to another.

The report also summarized departmental procedures as of that year, and discussed briefly recent research which gave conflicting views on the degree of validity of student questionnaires. In a memorandum to the Committee on May 7, chairman Schillace supported the report but added that quantifiable data must be supplemented by colleague evaluations and a candidate's own statement of teaching methods and goals.

The Burke report also added another refinement to the discussion, which subsequently became a major issue. "The most important purpose or function of the evaluation of teaching is to enable the instructor to improve his teaching effectiveness." This pointed out a potential conflict between the purpose of self-evaluation and review procedures, but did not explore the issue in detail.

The Burke report, officially dated July 16, 1975, was forwarded to the Provost, who responded on August 6 in full agreement with the report's tentative recommendations and Mr. Schillace's added emphasis on colleague evaluation and instructor's goal statement. Clearly, Oakland was operating under a consensus that we include all three elements of teaching evaluation for purposes of contract review.

To commence the next stage of the discussion, on October 21, 1975 the new committee chairman, Professor Michael Wozny, appointed two new groups. First was a subcommittee chaired by Professor Lawrence Lilliston which was to develop a set of common items for a student evaluation questionnaire; second was a subcommittee chaired by Mr. Burke to develop a proposal for

colleague evaluation. On February 10, 1976 the Burke subcommittee submitted a draft proposal for colleague visitation of an instructor's classes, which the full Committee endorsed on March 30, and then held until it could be combined with the student assessment into a two-part coordinated proposal. By this time it was becoming unclear whether the University Senate or the FRPC and the contract review process would have the ultimate responsibility for implementing proposals from the Committee.

On March 16, 1976 a task force on student questionnaires was announced, with a broader membership than the previous committee. Its report, a proposed standardized questionnaire, combined with the new Burke proposal, was the subject of a Senate debate in the fall of 1976. The joint text was printed in the Senate agenda for September 16.

On October 21, the Senate requested that Teaching and Learning administer a questionnaire experimentally for a year, "strictly for the purpose of determining whether or not this questionnaire can be used for making reliable assessments of perceptions of teaching effectiveness on a university-wide basis." In other words, as the debate became more systematic, separable issues were becoming separated from each other, and the subcommittee on student evaluation was being assigned a more precise and narrower task. Professor Lilliston volunteered to refine and administer the questionnaire according to the Senate's specifications, and report to the Committee by September '77.

Regarding the proposal for colleague visitation of an instructor's classes, a lengthy Senate debate on November 18 led to referring this difficult and controversial issue back to the Committee. No further action has been taken in this vexed and controversial area.

Professor Lilliston submitted the results of his research to the Committee in a report in early October 1977. His work included both the most thorough review of the literature on quantifiable questionnaires yet conducted at Oakland, and the results of his administering of the draft questionnaire in selected classes during the previous year. The report pointed out that this sort of questionnaire measures not faculty effectiveness but student perception of faculty performance. The work also indicated that the short-run stability of student responses is often very low, and suggested that on important items the meaning of students' responses may be difficult to interpret. Concerning whether this questionnaire, or one similar to it, could be used effectively for comparing performances across departmental lines, the report was cautious, pointing out some well-known difficulties in this area and stating that last year's research design had not tested this question conclusively.

Professor Lilliston's conclusions, as well as his background discussion, distinguished between the relatively informal use which an instructor might make of quantified "feedback" in revising his own syllabus and teaching methods, and the more rigorous use which review committees must make of the data. He concluded that survey questionnaires, unless administered by far more systematic and expensive methods than this model represents, are of little use for contract evaluations.

II. The Committee's Conclusions

The Committee discussed the report at its meeting of October 10, and repeated some elements of the discussion in a memorandum dated October 26 which accompanied the Lilliston report to Mr. Matthews and the Steering Committee of the Senate. Let me now summarize the Committee's perceptives somewhat more fully.

Regarding the reliability of quantified data, the Committee accepted Mr. Lilliston's conclusion that material of this sort, if taken by itself, is not adequately refined to provide a decisive basis for contract renewal or non-renewal. Differences of tenths of a point between two instructors, while seeming to be "hard data," are by themselves no more meaningful than other sorts of information which may seem more impressionistic. However, the Committee, several of whose members sit or have sat on college and university review committees, continued to feel strongly that some method of student evaluation of instructors is central to contract evaluation. Quantified data, most of us felt, if taken from a variety of classes and over a period of two to five years, can give vital indications at the top and bottom of a scale, suggesting who our consistently finest teachers may be and who is almost certainly too poor a teacher for Oakland to retain.

But quantified data must be only one element of a wider system of gathering insights into teaching performance. Additional methods of gaining students' views, such as selected interviews, colleague evaluation, and the candidate's own statement, must not be neglected.

In other words, the Committee was in accord with the Provost's original view of the review process, that it will safeguard both the candidate and the university if it is broad-based, not relying exclusively on any single type of information. We have heard, and are pleased, that some academic units have included more varied methods of gathering student assessments in their contract review procedures this winter.

Beyond this, the Committee had become deeply concerned by last October about the second dimension of teaching evaluation: the instructor's own use of student "feed-back" and other critiques for self-improvement. The first Burke report suggested that this is the most constructive use of evaluation methods. The Committee has been working somewhat haltingly for several years on ways in which Oakland might support faculty members in their efforts at self-improvement. A major step in this work was a day-long T/L workshop in March 1977, organized by Rosalind Andreas and the workshop subcommittee, which featured Dr. Larry Alexander, Director of Learning Services at Michigan State University. Dr. Alexander described several dimensions of the teaching improvement center there. Many of the thirty Oakland faculty participants who returned evaluations of the workshop to us afterwards indicated serious interest in developing similar support services here. The Committee has not had enough time or staff support this year to pursue this by systematic studies of Instructional Improvement Centers at Michigan State and elsewhere.

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But this is one of our highest priorities for the coming year. Among the elements of that work we hope to look at ways of improving testing methods, and also various ways of measuring student learning beyond instructors' own examination strategies.

In order to carry on this work more efficiently than in the past, we became convinced by last fall that it is imperative to separate the development of support services from the contract review process. Dr. Alexander was emphatic on this point from Michigan State's experience, and this bears out the experience of many other campuses. All have discovered that instructors must have absolute confidence in the confidentiality of the critiques they use, such as videotapes of their classes, or they will make little use of supportive resources on campus. We fear that those supports have little chance of coming into existence in the first place unless the process of developing them is separated from studies on behalf of the review process.