

Chapter 21

Defining University Teaching Excellence in a Globalized Profession

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In universities around the world, metrics have been developed to assess research extremely well in the career development of faculty; however, teaching effectiveness has been left to the subjective and usually unreliable evidence of student evaluations, unique or irregular classroom visits, and committee reviews of course syllabi and assignments. There are seldom standards of achievement provided, and each file is usually assessed without reference to others. There is need, then, for a broad set of expectations in the academy for what we call excellence and competence in teaching. This chapter discusses how the authors' experiences in faculty development in three institutions—in Canada, China, and Oman—reflects both the need for such metrics and the difficulties in establishing procedures in very different contexts. From this, he hopes a debate about how to establish international guidelines for teaching excellence that parallel the rigour given to the assessment of research can be initiated to guide decisions concerning appointment, promotion, and tenure in the modern, internationalized university.

There is no Nobel Prize in university teaching. Research is international; teaching is local. These somewhat facetious observations reveal a serious problem in the academy: the difficulties inherent in the assessment and recognition of excellence in teaching as a criterion for appointment, promotion and tenure. Particularly in

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research intensive universities around the world, metrics have been developed to assess research extremely well in the career development of faculty; however, teaching effectiveness has been left to the subjective and usually unreliable evidence of student evaluations, unique or irregular classroom visits and committee reviews of course syllabi and assignments. There are seldom standards of achievement provided and each file is usually assessed without reference to others.

This situation is one which has complicated the process of achieving, measuring and institutionalizing excellence in university instruction as a means of career development, especially in the critical decisions of promotion and tenure. Moreover, the problem has been exacerbated by the rapid globalization of the profession. In times when most faculty members arose from similar intellectual and cultural communities to their students and colleagues, judgments could be made largely without clear standards in place. The modern university, however, operates with global reach and in a world where such fundamental decisions concerning a professor's effectiveness and productivity in the classroom require clear guidelines and expectations. Moreover, just as the assessment of research operates within a very broad context of scholarship, so excellence in teaching must do the same both to ensure that students are taught at an appropriate level and that mobility among universities can be facilitated.

There is need, then, for a broad set of expectations in the academy for what we call excellence and competence in teaching. These guidelines must be sufficiently flexible as to allow for the diversity of cultural and disciplinary environments and the variety of institutions that call themselves universities; but they must be sufficiently rigorous in both expectation and process to ensure some degree of comparability among faculty across the academy.

This paper will discuss how my experience in faculty development in three institutions—in Canada, China, and Oman—reflects both the need for such metrics and the difficulties in establishing procedures in very different contexts. It will also through the example of an exceptional case study witness for the need of cooperation by the teaching faculty in the development and application of such tools. From this I hope a debate might be generated about how to establish international guidelines for teaching excellence which can be seen as parallel in rigour to the assessment of research to guide decisions concerning appointment, promotion and tenure in the modern, internationalized university.

The promotion and recognition of faculty on the basis of excellence in teaching reflects the problem inherent in recognizing and celebrating teaching in a research intensive university.¹ This issue has become a central concern in research intensive universities where the culture over the past half century has been defined by research and the ability to secure grants and attract very highly skilled post graduate and post doctoral students. Indeed, the question has become a divisive one at certain levels,

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