

Encouraging Teaching Advancement & Innovation

March 2024

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“The College enjoys a reputation for teaching excellence. Teaching excellence has been our institutional goal for many years and will remain so. Nonetheless, we must improve. In an increasingly competitive market, to stand still means to fall behind.”


Wilson College Annual Evaluation Guidelines

As claimed within our annual evaluation guidelines, all faculty are expected to continuously learn about and improve their teaching, reaching higher levels of excellence. Educational technology, content, assessment methods, our understanding of how students learn, and pedagogies advance over time, and we must advance with them. The purpose is not just to say we have advanced, but to improve student outcomes. The underlying assumption associated with our expectation for teaching excellence is that effective teaching impacts student learning. We change and innovate to further support student success through greater student learning.

Wilson College supports teaching innovation through various professional development opportunities. Faculty are encouraged to discuss professional development needs with their department heads each year so that heads are aware of any resource needs that faculty may have. However, access to development resources is not the only barrier to innovation in teaching identified by faculty. One barrier frequently cited by faculty for not trying a new teaching approach is the prospect of a negative impact on scores from the student assessment of teaching.

To mitigate this risk, Wilson College allows faculty members to identify a substantive change in their approach to teaching that they would like to implement in their course. In return, the faculty member receives commitment from their department head that the associated teaching assessments, should they differ negatively from previous terms, will not negatively impact the faculty member in their annual review for a pre-specified time.

This is not to say that the assessments will not take place. Assessments are required per the Faculty Handbook. But more importantly, assessments can be used to provide insight from the student's perspective, and this insight can be used for continuous improvement.



This opportunity does not remove the risk that the innovation/change may not achieve the desired outcomes, especially in this first semester. However, failure to achieve a specific outcome on the first try does not mean that the innovation or the faculty member who pursued it failed. It may take a multi-semester effort toward the goal. This is expected and can be accommodated.

Expectations

With this opportunity comes expectations. First, faculty seeking this opportunity will have a track record of meeting or exceeding expectations regarding teaching. Second, faculty must identify what they hope to improve, determine how they will measure the impact of their changes, and measure and share the results. (Note: one or more faculty members may be part of this project.)

Faculty who wish to pursue this opportunity will provide their department head with a written request that includes the following:

- Description of Innovation/Change
- Course(s) in which the change will be implemented
- Where possible & appropriate, provide a brief literature review that supports the change
- Outline of how the impact of the change will be assessed/measured (see Appendix A for ideas)
- Resources requested to support the innovation/change -- this includes, but is not limited to, professional development, software/equipment, etc.
- Timetable for implementation and reporting of results

The department head and faculty member will discuss the proposal. Upon approval from the head and dean, the approved proposal will be included in the faculty member's evaluation file to document the agreement. Upon conclusion, the faculty member(s) will report the results in writing to their department head.

A faculty member who chooses to present the results of this supported experiment at a domestic conference will be provided funding for that engagement.

Appendix A: Measuring/Assessing Impact

Content includes ideas provided by the Teaching Innovation Committee, 2017
This list is not exhaustive.

Considerations:

- Innovation is great, but is not a replacement for education. Rigor and critical thinking should not be sacrificed.
- Metrics should primarily focus on measuring the change in student learning resulting from the innovation.
- Metrics should align with the desired objectives of the innovation.
- Although important, neither student satisfaction or student engagement should be the only or predominant metric for evaluating the impact of the innovation. These are indirect measures.
- Publication of results associated with the innovation may be possible. Faculty are encouraged to seek IRB approval in advance.

Direct Measurement:

- Consider using exams, quizzes, projects and assignments to measure student learning as these are the most tangible evidence.
- Pre- and post tests can be used to measure the difference in teaching the old way to the new methods.
- Compare prior semester with current semester or one section with another section of the same course as this may provide control groups.
- Pilot new measurement tools with a couple of professors to gain additional perspectives.
- Track students' performance in the next sequential course.
- Consider at least one metric that incorporates GPA.

Indirect Measurement:

- View student engagement to see if they more actively participate in activities and discussion.
- Measure students' perception or self-assessment of the new method – whether or not it accomplished the intended learning goals; a self-efficacy approach might be useful.
- Gather feedback from students on new the components specifically (what worked well and what would they like to see changed)
- Use an external reviewer such as a faculty member from the same department sitting in on at least one class to critique, evaluate, and comment on the most immediately apparent and likely impact of the innovation. That could provide an impartial insight into whether, when, and how that particular innovation is likely to pass the cost-benefit test for that particular subject.
- Describe and demonstrate the results of the innovation.
- Recognition of student success (e.g., credentials achieved, badges earned, etc.)
- Provide additional information about the usefulness of the approach from a student or employer perspective. Consider measures like employment success, increase in job offers, or employer feedback on contemporary knowledge and relevant skills.