

August 1, 2007

To: Department Chairs

From: Larry E. Vote, provost

Re: Evaluation of Teaching

According to the mission of the College and the College By-laws, effective teaching is the most important faculty responsibility. Thus, it is the most important dimension of annual faculty evaluations as well as tenure and promotion decisions. We have a rather well-defined process for evaluation of teaching. In this memo I review some important teaching evaluation issues to be considered by you and your colleagues.

Under the College By-laws passed by the faculty and the Board of Trustees in 1993, the use of the ICES course evaluation forms for all courses taught in a term is mandatory a) for non-tenured faculty—in the two terms preceding the term during which they are evaluated for reappointment or promotion; b) and for tenured faculty—during any two consecutive terms in a three-year period, including the two terms before a promotion. In addition, the amended By-laws mandate narrative evaluations in all courses in the two terms preceding the tenure decision, and allow for the use of the ICES and/or narrative forms in other courses and terms at the request of the faculty member. When the faculty member wants the student responses entered into the evaluation record following these optional evaluations, the procedures used for the mandatory administration of the ICES are to be used.

These course evaluation provisions give faculty considerable latitude in establishing their record of teaching effectiveness, at least the record based on course evaluations. Some faculty have expressed concern about potential evaluation difficulties when a faculty member asks for course evaluations only as required under the College By-laws. It is important to recall that the College By-laws require systematic evidence in teaching from both student and peer evaluations in order to be appointed to a tenured position or be promoted to associate or full professor. I offer the following observations for you and your faculty to consider in decisions regarding course evaluations.

1. Since faculty members are required to possess both breadth and depth in their disciplines, they will normally be asked to teach a range of courses throughout their careers. Therefore, faculty should be able to provide systematic evidence of teaching effectiveness in lower-level as well as more advanced courses.
2. By having evaluations administered in their classes on a regular basis, faculty are better able to identify areas of concern, address them, and obtain evidence in course evaluations that the concerns are being successfully addressed.
3. According to the By-laws, tenured members of a faculty member's department are to have "first-hand evidence" of teaching effectiveness. The senior faculty in each department must determine what constitutes this first-hand evidence and how this evidence is to be acquired. On the other hand, faculty are encouraged to take the initiative in ensuring that their colleagues have sufficiently comprehensive information to use in the evaluation of their teaching.
4. There is an extensive and especially valuable literature on good instructional practices, effective and innovative pedagogies, and the reliable evaluation of teaching. Faculty are encouraged to rely on the findings in this literature for establishing teaching evaluation processes within their departments and for development of their individual records of teaching effectiveness. Faculty are strongly encouraged to develop a teaching portfolio

as a means for presenting systematic and comprehensive evidence of their teaching record, skills, and experience. Teaching portfolios may include such items as: syllabi, exams, assignments, self assessments, peer evaluations, the products of student work, student feed-back garnered through classroom activities, etc. The College provides an ongoing series of faculty development opportunities that assist faculty in developing a portfolio to represent their teaching record. The associate provost for academic affairs and/or the associate provost for academic services stand ready to discuss teaching portfolios with interested faculty and to assist faculty in the general development of a strong portfolio.

5. Individuals who join the St. Mary's faculty with a shortened probationary period or with tenure should establish the basis for student and colleague evaluations of their teaching in a timely manner.
6. Visiting faculty, term faculty not clearly scheduled for reappointment, and part-time faculty should expect to have their teaching evaluated regularly. The ICES course evaluation instrument should be administered as part of these evaluations.