Alternatives to Student Evaluations of Teaching

Rebecca Taylor
Educational Developer
MacPherson Institute
taylor10@mcmaster.ca
Learning outcomes

• Appreciate concerns surrounding student evaluations of teaching (i.e. SETs) that have emerged in the research literature

• Familiarize yourself with different methods of evidencing teaching effectiveness

• Consider types of evidence appropriate for your teaching and career context

• Apply the qualities of an effective written reflection
What this session doesn’t cover

• Details about writing a teaching philosophy statement

• Components of Supplementary Policy Statement B2: Teaching Portfolios

If these topics are of interest to you, please see the *Teaching Portfolios at McMaster* asynchronous workshop on Avenue site *Professional Development for Teaching*, or the *Preparing a McMaster Teaching Portfolio Guidebook*.
Assessment of Teaching at McMaster

Student Evaluations of Teaching (SETs)

Career Progress/Merit

Course Observations (MI)

Peer Observations of Teaching

Teaching Squares

Teaching Portfolios for Tenure/Promotion/Permanence

Midterm feedback – Course Refinements (MI)

Midterm feedback – DIY or Faculty-specific (ex. DSB, Hum)

New Faculty Mentorship Program (Sci, Soc Sci)
Assessment of Teaching at McMaster

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New Faculty Mentorship Program (Sci, Soc Sci)
Concerns about SETs

• Mounting evidence questioning SETs
  • Spooen et al. (2013) cast doubt on the validity of SETs that had been reported in previous reviews and added evidence on potential biases
  • Re-evaluations of studies included in previous review papers (ex. Uttl et al., 2017) identified issues with the methods/analysis: randomization not credible or size-effect bias
  • Ryerson decision: a single question on teaching effectiveness is not a valid assessment of teaching quality and could be a biased way to assess instructors

• MUFA Report (2019) recommended:
  • Suspend end-of-term SETs
  • Design student feedback that assesses learning experience rather than teaching
  • Clarify what effective teaching means for McMaster & how to assess it
McMaster response thus far

- Summative question language changed from evaluating teaching effectiveness to learning experience > shift from SETs to course evaluations

- Summative question experimented with as open-ended vs. ratings question

- Postdoctoral research position on postsecondary course evaluations

- Formative midterm feedback surveys updated & advertised in 2020-2021
Questions still unanswered

- **Educators:** What evaluation and development practices should I concentrate on to evidence the effectiveness of my teaching?

- **Graduate students:** How do I obtain valid evidence of my effectiveness as a TA without SETs?

- **Administrators:** How do I evaluate teaching for CP/M and Tenure, Promotion, and Permanence without relying on SETs data?
Direction from the T&L Strategy

• Evaluation of teaching needs to be multi-faceted and include **self-reflection, peer observations and student voices**. We are committed to ensuring that quality, relevance and impact of teaching is valued.
  • Review how teaching is evaluated and refine policies and processes to ensure a multi-faceted approach to evaluation is implemented

• Teaching as a Professional and Innovative Practice: It is essential that we ensure teaching excellence is equally valued, recognized and supported at the university
  • Refine policies & processes to demonstrate that teaching is valued and recognized as a professional practice
  • Build a culture that values **innovative, experimental and playful** mindsets
Direction from Policy

SPS B1: Procedures for the Assessment of Teaching

• “Sound evaluation of teaching mandates evaluation by multiple people, on multiple occasions and in multiple contexts.

• The product of the evaluation process will not be a uniform document, rather teaching is complex and the product of evaluation of teaching may also be complex.”

Be your own evaluator
Evidencing Your Impact
Evidencing Your Impact


‘Triangulation of evidence’ framework

• **Research** - consulting published research or conducting your own
• **Evaluation** - collecting your own data
• **Practice Wisdom** - your expert interpretation of the above
Realities

**Course Evaluations**
- Time-efficient
- Quantitative
- Summative
- How you did
- Evaluee

**Teaching Portfolios**
- Takes time
- Narrative
- Developmental
- How you’re doing
- Agency
Engaging in **SoTL** (as consumer)

SoTL can inform your practice day-to-day, your values, teaching philosophy statement, and more

- **Newsletters / Websites:**
  - The Teaching Professor: [https://www.teachingprofessor.com/](https://www.teachingprofessor.com/) - newsletter option
  - Contact North: [https://teachonline.ca/](https://teachonline.ca/) - tech focused; newsletter option
  - Scholarship Of Teaching And Learning Annotated Literature Database [https://sotlannotations.com/](https://sotlannotations.com/) - website

- **Journals:**
Formative evaluation

- Midterm formative student feedback *
- Peer feedback
- Letters of support, ex. from past students, administrators
- Sample course materials *
- Sample student work (with permission) *
- Before/after of student understanding (with permission) *
- Teaching certificates and awards *

*The reader may not understand the full significance of these types of evidence.. unless you tell them explicitly what that is...

*Share in the chat!: Have you utilized any of these methods? What additional methods have you used that aren’t mentioned in this list?*
The art of writing a Reflection

• Outline for an effective reflection

• What SoTL in reflection-writing tells us

• Reflecting for a Teaching Portfolio

• What isn’t a reflection

• How to reflect
Reflection outline

What?

So What?

Now What?
SoTL on reflecting

• Mary Ryan’s 4 R’s
  • 4 Rs: Reporting and responding, Relating, Reasoning, and Reconstructing
  • Use a critical incident, not a broad view of the term, or your year, or your teaching career

• Ash & Clayton’s DEAL model

  • DEAL Model: Describe, Examine, Articulate Learning,
  • Align your reflection with a learning outcome or goal
Integrating the theory

What:
Describe your goal, the context, and what happened during the critical incident.

So what:
Critical analysis – was there a misconception? Did expectations not match reality? What did you realize in the moment? What did you learn?

Now what:
How will you apply what you learned to your future teaching practice? Change? Keep the same? Did you achieve your goal? Has your goal shifted now?
Reflecting for a Teaching Portfolio

- Your ‘goals’ can be aligned with claims made in your teaching philosophy or the strategic directions of your department/institution
- Select critical incidents that align with your goals

What doesn’t count as a reflection?
- A summary! (i.e., “What?”)

What does?
- Describe your thinking, what you learned, and how that impacted/will impact you (i.e., “So what? Now what?”)
How to reflect: scaffold time

• Reserve time after important teaching moments to write

• Potential tools: blank page, your goals, prompts (ex. Ryan’s (2013) 4R’s article, Table 1 or Ash & Clayton’s (2009) DEAL model article, Tables 7 through 10)

• Set time aside to go back to your processing notes, re-read, re-think, and write down any new insights

• Set time aside to write it up into a narrative reflection. Aim for 1 page.

• At any of these points, ask yourself: what, so what now what?
Your next steps

Share in the chat:

• Which part of the ‘Triangulation of evidence’ framework (i.e. SoTL, Formative Evidence, and Reflection) might you start with for evidencing your impact?

• What are your teaching/reflection goals? (you may wish to think of your teaching philosophy)

• What are some critical incidents you could write a reflection about for your teaching portfolio?
Further resources

• Take the asynchronous *Teaching Portfolios at McMaster* workshop on the *Professional Development for Teaching* Avenue site
  • You can self-enrol via the *Discover* tab at the top of Avenue, after you login

• Review the [*Preparing a McMaster Teaching Portfolio Guidebook*](#)

• [Contact the MacPherson Institute](#) for a consult

• Book time with your Chair/Director, or employer, to discuss their views on good evidence of teaching effectiveness
Thank You!

Rebecca Taylor, Educational Developer
taylor10@mcmaster.ca