

Improvement and Assessment of Teaching Effectiveness: Some Issues under Discussion

Dr. Mahmoud Farag, Chair of the Senate Faculty Affairs Committee, 2010 – 2011

This article builds on the contribution of Dr. Pandeli Glavanis in the last issue of New Chalk Talk (November 23, 2010, Vol. 10, Issue 7) and is a follow-up on the report of the Senate working group on “Teaching Effectiveness at AUC: Assessment and Improvement”, May 2003. Many of the issues in this article were raised in the CLT Forum on Assessment of Teaching Effectiveness, November 3, 2010 and in the subsequent discussions in the Faculty Affairs Committee of the Senate. As the reader will see, this is still a work in progress and I welcome suggestions for improvement and ideas on how to proceed from here. It is hoped that eventually a statement on improvement and assessment of teaching effectiveness will be adopted by the University Senate next spring.

The Senate working group of 2003 defined effective teaching as: *Clear communication of appropriate course content in an environment that enhances learning and encourages the student to analyze and think critically and creatively.* This definition gives the three major aspects of teaching effectiveness, which can be used for its assessment:

- 1) Clear communication of the subject matter reflects the faculty member’s pedagogic skills and awareness of how the students learn. This can be assessed from student feedback and results of student evaluation of instruction.
- 2) The appropriateness of course content reflects the faculty member’s knowledge of how the course fits within the curriculum, recent development in the discipline, and general competence in the subject matter. This can be assessed by peers on the basis of course syllabus, content and textbooks, examples of student work, and samples of exams and assignments.
- 3) Enhancing student learning and encouraging them to analyze and think critically reflects the faculty member’s teaching philosophy, course management skills, and strategies for getting students engaged in the course material and discussions. This can be assessed on the basis of the faculty member’s statement on teaching, self-reflection, use of new and emerging technologies, engagement in teaching development activities, and interaction with the teaching community.

From Dr. Pandeli’s article and from the above it becomes clear that for a reliable assessment of teaching effectiveness we need to take all the above three element into consideration. It is proposed here that the three elements be given equal weight when assessing the teaching effectiveness.

While all the three elements are part of the academic environment at AUC, they are applied in different degrees in assessment of teaching effectiveness. Seeking student feedback and student evaluation of instruction are now established at AUC which explains why, in some cases, they are taken as the only measure of teaching effectiveness. Peer evaluation is less widely used at AUC than student evaluation of instruction as it requires more time and may yield variable, and in some cases biased, results unless done well. The third element, which is faculty members’ input, is part of the Annual Faculty Report and in some cases is not given enough attention by the faculty members themselves as a tool for self improvement, or by their departments as a tool for assessment.

The question that we need to answer now is how can we make the above three elements an integral part of teaching improvement and assessment at AUC, and how much weight should be assigned to each of them? The discussion in the CLT forum and in the faculty affairs committee points to the teaching portfolio as an important instrument which can provide information for assessment of both items 2 and 3 above. The portfolio is prepared by the faculty member and consists of two main sections (course content and efforts to enhance student learning). The items to be included in each section of the portfolio depend on the nature of the discipline and should be developed by

departments in consultation with their faculty. Examples of items that can be included in these two sections of the portfolio include the following:

Appropriateness of course content:

- Course syllabus
- Course reading material, textbooks, case studies, exercises and problems, audiovisual material
- Samples of student work, assignments, research papers, and exams, preferably for different levels in the class (e.g. A, B, C)
- Grade distribution in the course
- Expected course outcomes and how they fit with the overall objectives of the curriculum of the program
- How the course content reflects recent developments in the discipline and efforts to update the content if the course has been taught for several years.
- The variety and diversity of courses taught
- Preparation of new courses
- Reports on class visits

Efforts to enhance student learning:

- Self reflection and statement on teaching philosophy
- Strategies for getting students engaged in the course material and discussions.
- Grading policy
- Office hours and accessibility/availability to students
- Means of providing timely feedback to students
- Use of technology to enhance content delivery
- Professional development activities related to teaching
- Grants related to teaching enhancement and attending conferences related to teaching
- Publishing in teaching journals
- Mentoring and advising undergraduate and graduate students
- Supervising student theses, independent studies and directed research
- Conducting CLT mid-semester surveys to get student input

To help us improve this approach to assessment of teaching effectiveness, we need your input on the following points:

1. Do the three aspects (student evaluation of instruction, appropriateness of course material, and enhancement of student learning and critical thinking skills) give adequate description of teaching effectiveness? If not, please comment.
2. Should the three aspects be given equal weight when assessing teaching effectiveness? If not, what do you suggest?
3. Other comments and suggestions to the faculty affairs committee.

Please send your answers and comments to: mmfarag@aucegypt.edu