

IARP Consultation: Written Submission on Strategic Commitment # 9.

Teaching and research are interconnected and both contribute to the core success of UWinnipeg. We are committed to developing ways to understand, define, and measure success in both of these areas.

HOW DO WE ACHIEVE THIS?

How should we define and measure research success at the University of Winnipeg?

How should we define and measure teaching success at the University of Winnipeg?

Teaching Success

We support the goal of enhancing teaching and research success at the University, but we must confess that we do not fully understand the purpose of this strategic commitment. At the University of Winnipeg, teaching and research are expectations of every UWFA Member. The means for assessing this work, and for recognizing excellence in it, are governed by the Collective Agreement (CA) agreed by the parties. The CA identifies a wide variety of means by which Members can achieve excellent appraisals of their teaching and research contributions, and it recognizes that different Members will make different contributions at different moments in their careers, allowing them to achieve a wide range of professional development goals as they come up for tenure and eventually promotion to full professor. It recognizes that Members are professionals, that they take their responsibility to their students, their discipline, their colleagues, and their employer seriously. The CA ensures that every Member is evaluated by their peers (DPC), their Chair, their Dean, and the Vice-President Academic. It seems to us that this process is, with one particular exception, working well.

There is one aspect to this process that we believe is not working well; SET scores. SET scores illustrate the dangers of simplistic metrics for assessing performance. SET scores vary for reasons often unconnected with the quality of the teaching. Courses that are taken to satisfy particular degree requirements, as, for example, the Science requirement (and possibly the Indigenous course requirement), are often scored low for reasons unconnected with teaching success. It is also very difficult to correct for student biases in the standard student surveys of teaching currently favoured. According to one recent paper published in *ScienceOpen Research*, “SET measure students’ gender biases better than they measure teaching effectiveness.”¹ Research conducted by UW faculty reached the same conclusion.² Student evaluations also have been shown to disadvantage Indigenous faculty and faculty of colour. According to one study:

Unconscious bias, stereotypes, and assumptions about role appropriateness are the subjective parameters that students unconsciously carry in their heads and use to shape

¹ Quoted in Colleen Flaherty, “Bias Against Female Instructors,” *Inside Higher Ed* (11 January 2016), <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/01/11/new-analysis-offers-more-evidence-against-student-evaluations-teaching>, accessed 1 February 2016.

² Lisa Sinclair and Ziva Kunda, “Motivated Stereotyping of Women: She’s Fine if She Praised Me but Incompetent if She Criticized Me,” *PSPB* 26 (2000): 1329-42.

the way they perceive their women and minority professors. These professors must walk a narrow pathway to manifest their gender and race and balance their teaching goals; they must maintain their individual authenticity in the classroom and yet avoid alienating students who -- even at this late date -- may not have encountered a minority authority figure in a professional setting.³

Research Success

In terms of assessing research success, we again already do this through the CA procedure, and most of our comments pertaining to the CA evaluation of teaching apply to the evaluation of research activity. If the University is contemplating some parallel track of evaluation that exists outside the CA, it would be helpful to learn from the experience of other jurisdictions.⁴ In the 1980s, under the inspiration of (Conservative) Prime Minister Thatcher, Britain introduced a new means of assessing research performance called the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE).⁵ This exercise relied on simplistic metrics and was used by the central government to allocate funds for research to universities. Because the stakes were so high, individuals, departments, and universities all predictably adapted to this new environment and strove to ensure the highest possible success in this one critical area of performance. This had the predictable effect of divorcing teaching success from research success in that faculty began to focus more on the latter than the former.

The current (Conservative) British government recognizes that this exercise created perverse incentives and led to undesirable outcomes. According to the current government:

We need to be open and transparent in looking at options that explicitly address concerns about burden and bureaucracy and use this to inform the design and processes of the future REF. We must also address the ‘industries’ that some institutions create around the REF and the people who promote and encourage these behaviours. There are cases of universities running multiple ‘mock REFs’, bringing in external consultants and taking academics away from teaching and research. These activities appear to be a significant driver of the cost estimates cited above. These behaviours will be difficult to shift, but it will be important to consider the levers and incentives within the design of the REF and to guard wherever possible against unintended consequences.⁶

³ Sylvia R. Lazos, "Are Student Teaching Evaluations Holding Back Women and minorities?: The Perils of "Doing" gender and race in the classroom," in eds. Gabriella Gutierrez y Muhs, Yolanda Flores Niemann, Carmen G. Gonzalez and Angela P. Harris, *Presumed Incompetent: The Intersections of Race and Class for Women in Academia*, 164-185 (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2012), p. 166. Lazos calls for "macro analyses of bias in student evaluations" by gender, race and sexual orientation. See also Lisa Sinclair and Ziva Kunda, "Reactions to a Black Professional: Motivated Inhibition and Activation of Conflicting Stereotypes," *J. Person. Soc. Psych.* 77 (1999): 885-904;

⁴ Much of the following is inspired by Stefan Collini, "Who are the Spongers Now?" *London Review of Books* (21 January 2016), 33-37.

⁵ The REA was renamed the Research Excellence Framework (REF) in 2007. The first evaluation carried out under it, covering the period after 2008, took place in 2014.

⁶ The document is titled "Fulfilling our Potential" and may be accessed at https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/474227/BIS-15-623-fulfilling-our-potential-teaching-excellence-social-mobility-and-student-choice.pdf. The quote is on p. 74

The perverse incentives that the government identifies include the growth of ‘industries’ devoted to success at this exercise. Government estimates suggest that the two most recent exercises cost £66 (2008) and £246 (2014) million, the increase in the 2014 exercise coming in part because of a new emphasis on ‘impact’.⁷

We do not believe that adding an additional mechanism for measuring excellence will be the most efficient way of promoting it. If the experience of jurisdictions with far more experience than UW is anything to go by, the costs will be prohibitive and the outcomes will be undesirable. The current British government’s solution to the perverse incentives created by the REF is not to modify the REF but to create a Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) in the hopes, presumably, that the two sets of perverse incentives will cancel one another out. The metrics that the British government proposes to use to measure teaching effectiveness, however, are individually problematic and bundling them together to create an overall ‘score’ is arbitrary.

Conclusion

While we therefore regard new initiatives at measurement as misguided, in considering potential new methods of evaluating teaching we suggest that peer evaluation be seriously considered. It is a method favoured by many professions. In keeping with the spirit of the CA, such evaluation should either be carried out by the DPC or by a UWFA Member chosen from a list prepared by the Member to be evaluated.

We believe that there is much the University might consider to promote, for example, excellence in teaching. All Members know that the CTLT provides excellent support for pedagogical purposes, and all try to access their workshops as frequently as possible. But we all know that there is less uptake of these opportunities than we would like. We have no wish to burden the already-overburdened CTLT staff, but one way to increase faculty uptake would be to offer CTLT sessions at the Department level rather than University wide.

Another potential mechanism for increasing teaching success would be to create an opportunity for Teaching Leaves. This leave would require an application, as does the current Study Leave, but it could only be used for 0.25 FCE release time. (Members could take this leave in conjunction with, say, their participation in a team-taught 0.5 FCE course.) Members obtaining this Leave would be required to attend workshops and demonstrate concrete steps intended to increase pedagogical effectiveness. These might include transitioning to an online learning environment.

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⁷ “Fulfilling our Potential,” p. 73.