Teaching, Learning, and Assessment Task Force

Report

December 8, 2006
Introduction

The University of Connecticut is dedicated to excellence and to becoming one of the leading universities in the nation. As a research extensive university, research is the coin of the realm; however, the world’s great universities achieve that stature because of their superiority in both teaching and research. Teaching, like research, is of paramount importance at the University of Connecticut and the university community is striving toward a culture that celebrates and supports superior achievement in both areas.

Today, assessment and accreditation issues are a part of the fabric of university life. Universities, like our nation’s K-12 schools, face issues of accountability. For example, today, federal initiatives expect institutions of higher education to be accountable for good teaching and better student learning. Although we have been accountable in the past, it is imperative that we make sure our measures are transparent both to ourselves and to external constituents.

Culture change can be difficult; however, the process has begun. The Teachers for A New Era grant from the Carnegie Foundation of New York requires that administrators and faculty across campus work collaboratively to examine and improve curricula and pedagogical practices of prospective K-12 teachers. This initiative is beginning to affect the teaching and learning of undergraduate students at the University of Connecticut. The Provost has also initiated an assessment effort that includes faculty liaisons in every academic department. Learning outcomes have been established for majors; the liaisons, with their departments, are in the process of determining ways to measure these learning outcomes.

As a result of both internal and external influences, Provost Peter Nicholls appointed a task force on Teaching, Learning, and Assessment in order to promote a university culture that values excellence in teaching.

The Task Force on Teaching, Learning, and Assessment

The task force (see Appendix A for a list of the members of the committee) was charged by the provost with recommending ways to: 1) improve the quality of teaching and learning at the undergraduate and graduate levels; 2) offer opportunities for professional development for faculty; 3) develop assessment tools to inform and improve classroom instruction; 4) ensure that quality of teaching will be a strong consideration, along with research, in reappointment, promotion, tenure, and merit, as mandated in the by-laws.

In carrying out its charge the task force considered many ideas related to effective classroom practice. The task force recognized that the University of Connecticut has clear standards in each discipline for evaluating scholarship and improving and rewarding research. However, similar measures for evaluating and promoting effective teaching, and a reward structures that sufficiently recognizes such instruction, do not exist. Therefore, in responding to the Provost’s charge, the task force addressed these lacunae in three subcommittee reports: 1) enhancing the value of teaching; 2) opportunities for improving teaching; and 3) the evaluation of teaching. The following recommendations are endorsed by the entire task force.
I. Enhancing the Value of Teaching

This task force believes that our university community can and must transform the culture here to increase the value of and commitment to excellence in teaching. In order to do so, the task force has agreed upon the following specific recommendations:

**Recommendation 1: Increase the visibility of the University’s teaching mission.**

The task force believes that there should be an increase in the specific references to teaching on various web sites as well as a commitment to excellence in teaching in committees that deal with both teaching and assessment. This will help faculty and administration understand that we work in a culture that values and expects excellence in teaching. Specific recommendations include the following:

A. Redesign the Institute for Teaching and Learning website to include outstanding resources for teaching, such as teaching tips, as well as many other resources to help all faculty and teaching assistants become better teachers.

B. Include a more visible statement on the importance of teaching at the University of Connecticut on the Provost’s web page.

C. Ask deans of individual schools and colleges to modify their web pages to reinforce the importance of teaching and provide specific suggestions about teaching within individual disciplines and domains, as well as plans for encouraging teaching excellence for all faculty.

D. Identify funding sources for school and college level conferences on teaching excellence within domains and disciplines.

E. Provide a summary of opportunities for teaching mentorships within departments, units, or schools.

**Recommendation 2: Increase the importance of teaching in annual performance reports and in the PTR process.**

The task force recommends that tenure not be awarded unless both teaching and research are strong, which means a clear enforcement of university by-laws currently in place. The By-Laws of the University of Connecticut state: “Specific evidence of superior performance in scholarship and in teaching is of primary importance. As a minimum standard for tenure and/or promotion there must be evidence of strong performance in both scholarship and teaching and superior achievement in at least one of these areas.” While faculty members may excel in one, they must demonstrate strong achievement in both. (An example of appropriate language, based on the University of Virginia’s webpage, can be found in appendix B.) We also should recognize the value of the scholarship of teaching and about pedagogy within specific disciplines and domains.
If faculty (either tenured or non-tenure track) are well below expected levels of performance in teaching for more than two semesters, they should be asked to submit a teaching improvement/growth plan with plans for future improvement, effective instructional strategies, and appropriate assessment.

**Recommendation 3:** Each faculty member who is applying for promotion, tenure, and reappointment should submit a teaching portfolio as part of the PTR process. We anticipate that this teaching portfolio would be submitted for the third-year review, for tenure, and for promotion at both the associate and full professor level.

The task force recommends that a teaching portfolio become a required part of the Promotion, Tenure, and Reappointment process. (Some examples of artifacts that may be included in a teaching portfolio can be found in appendix C.)

**Recommendation 4:** Merit awards made by the Provost, Deans, and Department Heads should consider rewarding superior teaching performance. Currently, the major criterion is superior research. Specific recommendations include the following:

A. Provost-level merit will be awarded to only faculty who have achieved excellence in teaching and/or research.

B. Merit distributed by Deans and Department Heads will only be awarded to faculty who demonstrate excellence in teaching and/or research (for tenure track faculty), or teaching and service (for clinical and in-residence faculty, as appropriate to their position description).
II. Opportunities for Improving Teaching

A great university not only advocates and discusses good teaching, it also provides practical means to assist faculty in this essential aspect of their professional development. The task force therefore makes the following recommendations.

Recommendation 1: Encourage faculty to participate in professional development activities aimed at improving teaching practice. Specific recommendations include promoting the following:

A. Workshops on the appropriate use of technology (e.g., PowerPoint, Podcasts, Classroom Performance Systems, Tablet PC (i.e., Digital Ink), etc.,) as tools to deliver high-quality instruction.

B. Workshops and seminars dealing with issues of pedagogy and best practice (e.g. case method, group discussion, active learning strategies, etc.,) to promote excellence in teaching.

C. Teaching-related podcasts, weekly or bi-weekly, hosted by the Institute for Teaching and Learning to discuss teaching issues with invited faculty guests.

D. Faculty attendance at discipline-specific, as well as general, teaching conferences through university-level travel grants. Further, encourage faculty and administrators to host existing discipline-specific, national and/or regional teaching conferences.

E. Faculty handbook and/or website on teaching resources, policies, and practices to be made available to all faculty and administrators.

F. Faculty newsletter and/or website on teaching-related matters, teaching tips, syllabus construction, instructor-student interaction, etc., distributed monthly through the Institute for Teaching and Learning.

G. Faculty course development grants.

H. Training in how to perform peer evaluation of teaching offered by the Institute for Teaching and Learning.

I. Provide faculty professional development on teaching growth and improvement plans for faculty whose teaching needs to improve, based on both summative and formative assessment.
Recommendation 2: Encourage faculty to participate in formative peer observations of classroom instruction.

The task force encourages departments to develop a structure whereby faculty can be observed teaching by other members within their department or by members of the university community. The purpose of peer observations is to allow ALL faculty to improve their teaching through discussions and informal meetings with other faculty in a constructive environment.

Recommendation 3: Encourage and support university practices that improve teaching performance and student learning. Specific recommendations include the following:

A. Build or renovate a technologically sophisticated classroom with built-in video cameras that can be used as live broadcasts to other faculty who want to see models of best practice on-line.

B. Allow faculty to set their own attendance policies in their classes.

C. Resources should be allotted to provide additional learning experiences in courses that are stressed by large enrollments.

Recommendation 4: Build a university-wide community that supports and celebrates excellence in teaching. Specific recommendations include the following:

A. Organize informal monthly gatherings hosted by departments across campus to discuss teaching.

B. Institute a Teaching Fellows Dinner attended by Teaching Fellows as well as junior faculty to reward excellence in teaching.

C. Recognize teaching excellence by publicizing faculty awards in teaching.
III. The Evaluation of Teaching

A single method alone cannot sufficiently provide an adequate means to evaluate teaching. The task force recommends a multi-faceted approach that includes means of self-evaluation, peer evaluation, and professional evaluation, as well as student evaluation. The task force makes the following recommendations.

Recommendation 1: The evaluation of teaching should include both formative and summative evaluations.

Formative assessments, which provide feedback to faculty for the purpose of improving teaching, can be done at the course level as well as in the broader context of a teaching career. Formative feedback is always confidential to the instructor and should never be included in evaluation for tenure, merit, or promotion. Formative assessments may include student input (collected at mid-semester or periodically throughout a course), peer observations of teaching, peer evaluations of teaching materials, and observations and consultations with staff from the Institute for Teaching & Learning.

Summative evaluations, which are used exclusively for the purposes of tenure, promotion, and merit, have restricted confidentiality. These data are used by deans, department heads, and PTR committees for high-stakes decisions. There should be clear and explicit policies and procedures for the collection and distribution of these data. The summative evaluation materials can consist of student ratings (usually end-of-semester), self-evaluation materials such as those included in a teaching portfolio, peer and/or supervisor evaluation of teaching materials and observations of teaching, and supervisor evaluation of a faculty member’s contribution to the departmental teaching goals.

For best practices in summative peer review and observation, see Appendix D.

Recommendation 2: Replace the current student ratings of instruction instrument with a more appropriate, reliable, and valid instrument.

The task force believes the current evaluation form, last revised in 1989, needs to be replaced. Changing the forms for student ratings of instruction (SRI) will require extensive work. Core questions should include student information (to assist in interpreting scores), overall instructor and course ratings, and diagnostic instructor and course questions. In addition, an SRI should incorporate:

- Multiple forms with additional diagnostic questions chosen by the instructor or department members.
- An option of a paper copy or a computerized version of the instrument.
- An improved procedure for reporting results and interpretations to the faculty member.
- A means for faculty to understand the relationship between student ratings and classroom learning objectives.
The task force recommends that a changed SRI form be implemented with other additional changes in teaching evaluation (i.e., observations, instructions on interpretation, portfolios, etc.). In other words, improved SRI’s are not sufficiently effective to improve pedagogy when used in isolation from other methods. In addition, the task force does recommend that more than one new form be developed (e.g., different forms for labs, discussion sections, studio classes, writing courses, graduate seminars, etc.). An example of an SRI can be found in Appendix D.

**Recommendation 3:** Peer teaching observations should be part of the evaluation process of faculty for promotion and tenure.

A. Peer and professional teaching observations should be conducted for all tenure track Assistant Professors at least twice before the third-year review, and twice more before the tenure review. Additional observations can be conducted on request, and when student ratings indicate that there may be concerns.

B. Observations should be considered for a random sample of post-tenure instructors.

C. Protocols for peer observation should be established by the University Senate in accordance with best practices, many of which can be found on the websites of our peer and aspirant institutions. For example, faculty should have input into the choice of observers and timing of the observations.

D. The Institute for Teaching and Learning will offer workshops to train peer observers.

E. As more faculty choose to teach courses online, the process of peer evaluation of teaching must be modified to address the asynchronous nature of these courses. Fundamentally the procedure for peer observation should remain the same (pre-observation, observation, post-observation), but the method used for the observation process should be addressed. The process should involve the observation of a course over a set period of time. The time will be dependant on each course’s schedule of student activities. Generally speaking, a one-week cycle of observation of online courses should be allotted for each session of a traditionally taught course. During this online observation period, the observer will view interactions such as, teacher-student interaction, discussion postings, and student assignments. For examples of peer evaluation of teaching of on-line courses, see Appendix F.

**Recommendation 4:** Teaching Portfolios become part of the annual review process of faculty. (See Recommendation 3 in the section Enhancing the Value of Teaching.)
Appendix A

Committee Members

Veronica Makowsky *, Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education and Regional Campus Administration
Thomas DeFranco *, Associate Dean and Professor, Neag School of Education and Department of Mathematics
Lawrence Armstrong, Professor, Department of Kinesiology, Neag School of Education
John Bennett, Jr., Associate Dean and Associate Professor, Department of Mechanical Engineering, School of Engineering
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Sean Jeffery, Associate Clinical Professor of Pharmacy, School of Pharmacy
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David Miller, Professor, and Associate Department Head and Coordinator of Undergraduate Studies, Department of Psychology, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences
Jeffrey Ogbar, Associate Professor, Department of History, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, and Director: Institute for African American Studies
David Ouimette, Executive Program Director, First Year Programs, Institute for Student Success
Sally Reis, Board of Trustees Distinguished Professor, University Teaching Fellow, Department of Educational Psychology, Neag School of Education
Andrew Rosman, Associate Professor, School of Business
Catherine Ross, Director, TA Programs & Associate Director, Institute for Teaching and Learning
Eric Soulsby, Assistant Vice Provost, Assessment
Harilharan Swaminathan, Department Head and Professor, Department of Educational Psychology, Neag School of Education

* Co-chairs
Appendix B

Promotion and Tenure Statement

The statement below has been adapted from the Provost’s webpage at The University of Virginia for the University of Connecticut. Such a statement could become a part of Provost Nicholls’ webpage, after being considered for a vote of agreement by the Senate Faculty Standards Committee and the Senate at large.

Tenure will not normally be awarded at The University of Connecticut unless there is evidence of the candidate’s commitment to excellence in both teaching and research. Professors at the University of Connecticut are expected to submit a teaching portfolio during the PTR process that includes evidence of excellence in teaching and a commitment to improvement and enhancement of teaching during the pre-tenure years. The teaching portfolio can include examples of teaching excellence such as information about course design, course materials, methods of student assessment, examples of student interaction with the faculty member, and various other materials that demonstrate methods of the candidates’ efforts to enhance teaching and learning. Student evaluations will be considered part of the evidence of these teaching portfolios, but are not sufficient evidence of teaching quality, which is more broadly defined at UConn, as advisement, accessibility, enhancement of content, good classroom instruction, broad methods of feedback, evaluation, and assessment. It is clear that the means of assessment and evaluation of excellent teaching will vary between undergraduate and graduate teaching and across domains, but an understanding must exist that student evaluations are not to be used as the primary or only method of assessing a faculty member’s effectiveness as a teacher, for as stated succinctly on the University of Virginia’s web page, “Popular teaching and good teaching are not necessarily the same thing.” 1 (For further information regarding this policy see: http://www.virginia.edu/provost/docs_policies/performance.html )
Appendix C

Teaching Portfolio

Some examples of artifacts that may be included in a teaching portfolio are:

(a) the candidate’s personal statement on teaching, including a summary and explanation—not to exceed three pages—of the candidate’s accomplishments and future plans to enhance teaching and learning, with an additional section summarizing these accomplishments and plans;

(b) a list of the candidate’s teaching assignments on a semester-by-semester basis, from most to least recent, with a summary of the number of students in each class, as well as a summary of student evaluations for each course. (All teaching evaluations must be attached as an appendix to the Teaching Portfolio);

(c) copies of course materials, including syllabi, instructional Web pages, computer laboratory materials, and other examples of teaching and assessment materials, such as power points; student papers and portfolios; examinations; exemplary student products; and creative student work.

(d) when applicable, a list of graduate students, doctoral students, or other postdoctoral students supervised, including each student’s name, degree objective, and first post-graduate position;

(e) textbooks authored for courses; articles written about teaching pedagogy within various domains; conference papers and conferences organized on pedagogy.

(f) joint authorship with students of articles published; joint presentations at state or national conferences with students or other indications of faculty mentorship of students;

(g) and, as an appendix to the portfolio, copies of teaching evaluations by students for each course taught (the candidate will include all student teaching evaluations).
Appendix D

Best Practice in Summative Peer Review and Observation

1. **Peer review is best for the following areas of focus.** (Seldin, 1984, pp. 139-140)
   - Selection and mastery of course content
   - Appropriateness of course objectives and instructional materials
   - Appropriateness of methodology for teaching specified section of courses
   - Appropriateness of techniques for fostering and measuring student learning
   - Course organization
   - Student achievement based on exams, projects, presentations, etc.
   - Concern for and interest in teaching
   - Homework assignments, textbooks, course websites and handouts

2. **Peer reviewers understand their task and are well-prepared to accomplish it.** (Chism, 1999, pp. 26-35)
   - Initial training provided by ITL on various ways to evaluate teaching artifacts and how to do observations
   - Reviewers should go through the process of being reviewed
   - Agreement on standards for effective teaching in the department, college or institution
   - Opportunities to engage in meaningful dialogue with other peers while process takes place for help in illuminating issues
   - Reviewers themselves learn through the process

3. **Trust and confidence in the process are exhibited by all parties.** (Chism, 1999, pp. 26-35)
   - Use of explicit standards and protocols
   - Procedures for handling conflicts of interest, personality conflicts, etc.
   - Conclusions always tied to evidence: teaching portfolio materials, observations, etc.
   - Written summaries provide opportunities for rebuttal

4. **Teaching evaluation for summative purposes should always be holistic, carried out over an extended period of time and range of conditions, and should look at general patterns, not isolated incidences.** (Chism, 1999, p 34)
   - Use of multiple observers and multiple observations

5. **Ongoing departmental support of peer evaluation and oversight of the process and procedures, investment in improving the peer review process.** (Chism, 1999, pp. 26-35)

Bibliography:

Appendix E

Student Ratings of Instruction

“Sample Items”

The following sample items were selected from the SRI’s used by other universities which have undergone examination and revision of their forms. They are provided as a starting point for our own new SRI forms. It is not anticipated that all of these questions will be included in our forms; additional ones may be added; some of the ones we use may need different wording.

In addition to a core set of questions to be used for all courses, it is recommended that additional questions be used as selected by instructors and departments, with different additional questions for different types of courses (e.g., labs, discussion sections, studios, etc.).

The questions here are designed for face-to-face courses; on-line courses will need a modification specifically for them.

Note that an improved SRI form is only one component of the recommended new practices in evaluation of teaching. SRI’s should not be the only source of information about teaching. In addition, improvements are recommended in the reporting of results, taking into account more detailed information about the students and course.

Student information

1. Which best describes this course for you?
   A. Requirement for your major/minor
   B. General Education requirement
   C. Other requirement
   D. Elective

2. What grade do you expect to receive in this class?
   A     A-     B+
   B     B-     C+
   C     C-     D+
   D     D-     F
   Other (e.g. taking the course Pass/Fail, auditing course)

3. What is your class level? [OR: How many units have you completed?]?
   A. Freshman
   B. Sophomore
   C. Junior
   D. Senior
   E. Graduate
   F. Other

4. On average, how many hours per week have you spent on this course, including attending classes, doing readings, reviewing notes, writing papers, and any other related course work?
   A. Under 2       F. 10-11       K. 20-21
   B. 2-3          G. 12-13       L. 22 or
   C. 4-5          H. 14-15       more
   D. 6-7          I. 16-17
   E. 8-9          J. 18-19
5. On average, how often did you attend class?
   A. Never
   B. Rarely
   C. Sometimes
   D. Often
   E. Always

6. In my opinion, the workload in this course was
   A. Excessive
   B. High
   C. Average
   D. Light
   E. Insufficient

7. My overall G.P.A. to date at UConn is
   A. Less than 2.00
   B. 2.00-2.49
   C. 2.50-2.99
   D. 3.00-3.49
   E. 3.50-4.00

### Summative/Overall

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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<tr>
<td>Overall, this instructor’s teaching was helpful to my learning the material in the course.</td>
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<th>Satisfactory</th>
<th>Very Good</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
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<tr>
<td>Overall, this instructor was</td>
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<tr>
<th>Definitely Not</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Maybe</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Definitely</th>
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<tr>
<td>Would you recommend this course?</td>
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### Diagnostic

#### Course

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<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The course was well organized with serious attention to the learning objectives</td>
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| | | | | |
| 2. The course learning objectives and | | | | |
assignments were clearly stated

3. In my opinion, the assignments, presentations, projects or papers required in the course were worthwhile learning experiences well-aligned with the learning objectives

4. The course crucially relied on information/skills from its prerequisites

5. At this point in time, I feel that this course will be (or already has been) of value to me

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<th>Very Poor</th>
<th>Unsatisfactory</th>
<th>Satisfactory</th>
<th>Very Good</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>The course content was</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Value of course toward development of intellectual skills (critical analysis, written/oral communication, research, …) was</td>
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<th></th>
<th>Very Low</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Very High</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>The intellectual challenge presented in this course was</td>
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**Instructor**

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>The instructor communicated information effectively</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>The instructor showed interest in the progress of students</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>The tests/assignments were usually graded and returned promptly</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>The instructor made me feel free to ask questions, disagree, and express my ideas in class</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>The instructor seemed well-prepared for class</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>The instructor seemed genuinely interested in teaching the course</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>The instructor was generally accessible to students outside of class</td>
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<td>8.</td>
<td>My performance in this course has been evaluated fairly</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>The instructor gave adequate instructions concerning assignments</td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>The instructor has tried to make the course material educationally valuable to me</td>
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<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>The instructor has increased my knowledge and competence in the subject of this course</td>
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<td>12.</td>
<td>The instructor inspired me to think more about the content of the course than what was required</td>
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<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>The instructor treated students respectfully</td>
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<td>14.</td>
<td>The instructor posed excellent questions or problems</td>
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<th></th>
<th>Almost</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
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<th>Frequently</th>
<th>Almost Always</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>The instructor cleared up points of confusion</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>The instructor used class time well</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>The instructor stimulated student participation in the class</td>
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Appendix F

Examples of Peer Evaluation of Teaching of On-line Courses

Department of Librarianship, Educational Technology, & Distance Instruction
East Carolina University
Peer Review Instrument

Maryland Online (MOL), a statewide consortium of 19 Maryland community colleges and senior institutions
PEER COURSE REVIEW -- RUBRIC
http://www.esac.org/fdi/rubric/finalsurvey/demorubric.asp