

Memo

To: Engineering Faculty Council (EFC) Representatives

From: Mark Redekopp, Chair, Joint EFC/Viterbi Teaching Evaluation Committee
Shahram Ghandeharizadeh, Mike Neely, Gigi Ragusa, Paul Ronney, Elisa Warford
Members, Joint EFC/Viterbi Teaching Evaluation Committee
Erik Johnson, Vice Dean for Academic Programs (ex-officio member)
Timothy Pinkston, Vice Dean for Faculty Affairs (ex-officio member)

Cc: Todd Brun, Chair, Engineering Faculty Council (EFC)
Elizabeth Fife, Vice Chair, EFC

Date: April 3, 2019

Subject: Proposed Process for Evaluating Teaching Excellence in Viterbi

1. Background and Context

The mission of the Joint Viterbi EFC/Dean's Teaching Evaluation Committee is to respond to the Provost's request that each school create a plan to **define, develop, evaluate, and reward** excellence in teaching. In Fall 2018 our committee drafted the [Viterbi Definition of Teaching Excellence](#) (VDoTE) which was then approved by the EFC as well as the department Chairs and program Directors. Our committee is now focused on evaluating teaching excellence.

In developing this proposal, our committee was guided by the Viterbi Definition of Teaching Excellence (VDoTE). Our goal was to develop an evaluation system to measure achievement towards the items listed in that definition. The additional following principles have also shaped our committee's proposal for the evaluation process

- *The process should be streamlined, scalable, and effective while limiting potential biases.* Based on input from faculty and academic unit Chairs and Directors, it is clear that any evaluation process should maintain *simplicity* and be *streamlined* to mitigate the time burden on faculty. In response, our committee determined that mandatory peer evaluation of teaching for all faculty each year is not *scalable*; however, an "opt-in" process for peer evaluation could strengthen the multi-dimensionality of the evaluation process, thereby addressing the issues of potential bias.
- *The process should be aligned with the definition of teaching excellence.*

- *The process should involve human judgment* to address faculty concerns such as the potential ease of manipulating a single method of evaluation or a standalone “formula” that gives credit for specific aspects of teaching.
- *The process should address issues of potential bias but not disregard student feedback.*
- *The process should encourage development of teaching excellence and incorporate feedback from students, peers, and/or accepted best practices.*

In addition, during our discussions with faculty constituencies, the following themes were repeated:

- The desire not to be evaluated based *solely* on student survey responses but the strong belief that the responses are an important part of the evaluation process that should be included.
- The desire that teaching evaluation should also consider a summary of instructional materials.
- The importance of instructors being able to provide context to review committees to help interpret student survey responses (e.g. major incidents of academic integrity violations, new pedagogical approaches being employed, course structure and audience, etc.).
- The desire that the system not be overly prescriptive or formulated in a way that could easily be “gamed” to achieve higher than deserved teaching performance ratings; and
- The desire for soliciting feedback from graduating students or alumni to identify particularly effective or ineffective courses and instruction practices.

2. Proposal

As our committee recognizes that any proposed approach and methods are only recommendations and thus can be altered or adjusted to suit the diverse needs of the faculty in each academic unit, we have attempted to create a framework that could be easily adjusted and/or modified as deemed appropriate.

We propose an evaluation system based on end-of-semester student survey responses, via USC’s current Student Learning Experience Survey (SLES), as well as on summary information provided *optionally* by faculty members about their courses, via a simplified annual teaching record portfolio (ATRP). To address issues of potential bias, we also propose an *opt-in* system of peer-observation and evaluation of classroom teaching, but we do NOT mandate it for all faculty. Specifically, we propose the following.

1. The continued use of student survey data as a component of evaluating teaching excellence. Students have far greater contact time on which to base their evaluation than peer-observers would and can reasonably rate many items from the VDoTE. We propose using the current USC end-of-semester student learning experience survey (SLES) augmented with two additional questions, along with a mapping of those questions to the Viterbi Definition of Teaching Excellence (VDoTE) to produce scores for a majority of the items in the VDoTE. These scores can then be used, if academic units desire, to produce a single score using a

weighted average. [Section 3](#) details this mapping, suggested weighting, and how this information may be provided to departments with only limited administrative overhead.

2. We propose the use of an Annual Teaching Record and Portfolio (ATRP) by faculty to be evaluated by review committees, similar to what is currently completed in some Viterbi academic units. The proposed ATRP would allow faculty *optionally* to provide the following:
 - a. Summary information about courses taught that could provide relevant and important contexts which may be considered by the review committee;
 - b. Course materials (e.g., syllabus, exam/project, some sample instructional materials, etc.) which provide evidence supporting the faculty's achievement relative to the various items in the VDoTE. Although course materials would be optional, we believe these types of instructional materials are useful for facilitating objective evaluation of teaching performance by review committees;
 - c. A summary of efforts by the faculty member to improve their teaching by incorporating feedback from student surveys, peer observation, attending conferences and/or teaching workshops, and any other professional development activities to improve instructional practice; and
 - d. Other curricular development activities, awards, and honors related to teaching.

A proposed ATRP template is found in [section 4](#) and can be modified as deemed appropriate.

3. We propose that *classroom* peer-observation and evaluation NOT be mandatory for all faculty, as suggested by the Provost's April 2, 2018, memo regarding USC's Model of Teaching Excellence. We believe evaluation by review committees based on the components described above can serve as the primary method of teaching performance review. However, as a possible means of addressing issues of bias, we propose an *opt-in* classroom peer-observation and evaluation system, as an alternative or augmentation. Faculty who believe student survey scores may be affected by bias or are not representative of the quality of their teaching as it relates to the VDoTE may *opt-in* to classroom peer-observation and evaluation to supplement student survey responses. The proposed system is described in [section 5](#).

3. Student-based Evaluation

[Student Learning Experiences Evaluation Questions and Proposed Mapping to VDoTE and Weighting](#)

Our committee examined the current USC Student Learning Experiences Survey (SLES) questions and mapped them to the VDoTE items. A majority of the questions mapped well to at least one of the VDoTE items. The linked document above illustrates this mapping. As a few questions seemed

less germane to any particular VDoTE item, we believe their inclusion in producing a rating was optional (e.g., question “g” and “i” in the attached document). Conversely, some VDoTE items were not directly addressed by any of the SLES questions, hence we propose inclusion of two additional questions: question “r” addresses how instructors interact with and treat students, and question “s” addresses course rigor. Furthermore, because of the diversity of the kinds of courses taught by Viterbi faculty, not all questions may be applicable to every course. Thus, we propose an additional response item of “N/A” to be added to the 1-4 scale/ratings currently used in the SLES.

Once weights are assigned with the mapping of the SLES questions, individual ratings for each VDoTE item and, potentially, a single weighted score over all courses can automatically be computed for each each faculty member. Each academic unit receives a spreadsheet for all instructors and their mean SLES scores for *each* question of *each* course, allowing a simple and streamlined process for departments and programs to produce individual ratings and overall weighted average scores for all of its faculty members, with minimal additional effort compared to existing processes and practices.

4. Annual Teaching Record and Portfolio Evaluation

[ATRP Document \(to be completed annually by faculty\)](#)

The ATRP optionally allows faculty to provide primary sources as evidence of their teaching relative to the VDoTE items. This input can serve as the primary, non-student-based evaluation of teaching excellence and can be reviewed annually by review committees. Akin to the Annual Faculty Record currently used in several Viterbi academic units currently, this 1 page document (compared to the multiple pages related to teaching in AFRs used currently) requests information that could objectively be used by review committees to measure teaching excellence, consistent with the VDoTE, and thereby not rely solely on student evaluations. Some feedback we received from academic units that currently use an AFR form is the difficulty of converting the qualitative feedback provided on the AFR to the single score provided by Q11 and Q12 of the previous student evaluations. By having faculty provide sample teaching materials and summary information that is directly related to specific VDoTE items, we believe review committees can more easily and objectively determine ratings and/or make needed adjustments to student-based ratings than is currently done. We understand that some hold the view that student surveys can be gamed by instructors simply by “making the course easy” or being “generous” when grading. Regardless of the veracity of this, we believe the ATRP will provide increased confidence in the objectivity of the teaching evaluation process. In addition, we believe that the evaluation process should strongly encourage faculty to reflect on their teaching and incentivize incorporation of feedback to improve their teaching. Thus, we have specifically included this in both the VDoTE as well as in a section of the simplified ATRP form.

Importantly, our committee believes that this process would NOT require significantly more time than the current process for academic units which currently use an AFR form. Moreover, the proposed process fulfills the mandate by the Provost to include non-student-based measures of teaching

excellence in the evaluation process. When compared to the time required for mandatory classroom peer-observation and evaluation, we believe that this is the preferable approach.

5. Opt-In Classroom Observation Peer Evaluation

[Classroom Observation Peer-Evaluation Protocol and Rubric/Feedback Form](#)

Faculty who believe student survey scores may be affected by potential bias or are not representative of the quality of their teaching as it relates to the VDoTE may *opt-in* to a classroom peer-observation and evaluation system. This process would be initiated by a faculty with their respective Chair or Director at the start of the year for which they would be evaluated. We propose the following possible groups of observers: a.) USC CET designated STEM faculty, b.) Viterbi faculty who have gone through USC CET training as a faculty fellow, or c.) designees appointed by the academic unit. We recommend that each observation committee include at least two observers, that they observe at least two class sessions, and that the sessions are observed by them together. Further, we recommend the observed faculty be allowed to select *not more than half* of the sessions to be observed. The remaining classroom observations should be unannounced but within a specific time period during the semester, as determined by the observers. The observers should provide feedback to the faculty and eventually to the review committee through the provided rubric (see **Section 6**). The review committee, based on the classroom observation input and the ATRP provided by the faculty member, can then decide to adjust the final evaluation rating based on the additional input and provide their rationale for the adjustment.

6. Evaluation Rubric

[Teaching Evaluation Rubric \(to be completed by departmental review committees\)](#)

Provided with the student-based and optional non-student-based measurements of teaching excellence, annual review committees would be tasked to arrive at a final rating for each faculty member. The above rubric can be used to report feedback and findings both to the faculty being evaluated and to the cognizant department/program administrator and School administration.