



## MEMORANDUM

**To:** Executive Committee of Faculty Council (February 7, 2023)  
Faculty Council (February 27, 2023)

**From:** Professor Elodie Passeport  
Chair, Teaching Methods & Resources Committee

**Date:** December 15, 2022; revised February 14, 2023

**Re:** **FASE Best Practices for Assessing Teaching Effectiveness in PTR Decisions**

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### REPORT CLASSIFICATION

This is a major policy matter that will be considered by the Executive Committee for endorsement and forwarding to Faculty Council for vote as a regular motion (requiring a simple majority of members present and voting to carry).

### BACKGROUND

The attached document is titled *FASE Best Practices for Assessing Teaching Effectiveness in PTR Decisions*. This document was developed following the results of a survey conducted in 2018 with Chairs and Directors about how each department and unit conduct their PTR process. The survey highlighted some differences in PTR processes among the departments and units. There was therefore a need from Chairs and Directors for guidance on how to evaluate teaching effectiveness in PTR decisions.

### PROPOSED

The committee proposes to adopt the *FASE Best Practices for Assessing Teaching Effectiveness in PTR Decisions* document. This document is intended for both PTR committees and faculty members. It aims to promote some consistency in best practices across FASE in the evaluation of teaching effectiveness during PTR decisions. The document clarifies what constitutes teaching effectiveness and how it can be demonstrated and evaluated in PTR decisions for both teaching- and tenure-stream faculty. The document highlights sections of the *FASE Guidelines for the Assessment of Effectiveness of Teaching in Tenure, Continuing Status and Promotion Decisions* (GAET) and the *U of T Academic Administrative Procedures Manual* (AAPM) that are relevant to PTR decisions.

## **CONSULTATION PROCESS**

In November 2021, the TMRC conducted a survey of Chairs and Directors whose feedback helped draft the document. An earlier version of this document was sent for review to Chairs and Directors in 2022. Minor comments were received and incorporated in the document presented here. The Faculty's Academic HR office and the Vice-Provost, Faculty & Academic Life office also reviewed the draft document and their feedback was incorporated where appropriate.

## **RECOMMENDATION FOR COUNCIL**

THAT the *FASE Best Practices for Assessing Teaching Effectiveness in PTR Decisions*, as described in Report 3733 Revised, be approved effective immediately.

## FASE BEST PRACTICES FOR ASSESSING TEACHING EFFECTIVENESS IN PTR DECISIONS

This document was developed by the FASE Teaching Methods & Resources Committee (December 2022) and approved by FASE Council on February 27, 2023.

### **What is the purpose of this document, and who is the intended audience?**

This document is intended for both PTR committees and faculty members and aims to promote some consistency in best practices across FASE in the evaluation of teaching effectiveness during annual PTR decisions. It references and builds upon the following key policy documents, which should be reviewed by both audiences during annual reviews:

GAET: FASE Guidelines for the Assessment of Effectiveness of Teaching in Tenure, Continuing Status and Promotion Decisions<sup>1</sup>

AAPM: U of T Academic Administrative Procedures Manual (PTR Section)<sup>2</sup>

### **What constitutes “teaching” and “teaching effectiveness” [for PTR]?**

As described in GAET, teaching fundamentally includes *“lecturing, activity in seminars and tutorials, individual and group discussion, laboratory teaching, thesis and/or research supervision, and any other means by which students derive educational benefit.”* AAPM notes that *“[t]eaching evaluation should not be confined just to the classroom or laboratory,”* and that PTR should recognize *“contributions such as the development of new courses or programs, contributions towards the development of a new curriculum, the integration of research into undergraduate and graduate teaching or superior performance as measured through such mechanisms as the course evaluation.”* AAPM further notes that *“[i]n assessing a faculty member’s teaching, it is important to refer to the divisional guidelines,”* i.e., GAET.

GAET states that *“effective teaching aspires to provide to all students not only knowledge of facts but also the skills to analyze, to assess critically, to develop creative expression, to understand in context, to present arguments in a clear and compelling fashion, to solve problems, and to generate new knowledge.”* Perhaps most importantly for PTR, GAET provides specific criteria that faculty members can use to demonstrate how these aspirations have been turned into action by way of teaching skills, educational leadership, and teaching initiatives. Individuals are therefore strongly encouraged to review GAET, especially sections A5 (Tenure Stream) and B5 (Teaching Stream) when filling their Annual Activity Report.

### **What should be included in the Annual Activity Report (AAR)?**

Per AAPM, *“[t]he [AAR] should be more than just a listing of an individual’s research and scholarship, teaching and service contributions.”* FASE, therefore, strongly encourages the inclusion of a free-form self-assessment statement, summarizing the broader significance of one’s teaching contributions and achievements within or beyond the university. Making specific reference to GAET’s criteria and sub-criteria for teaching effectiveness in one’s free-form statement is therefore helpful to PTR committees.

AAPM further notes that *“individuals should be clear on the changes in activity from the previous year and [...] comment on the significance of their activities.”* These may include things like new course design or changes within existing courses; goals you set for yourself in the previous academic year, and a measure of your performance towards achieving those goals; methods you used which helped you teach effectively, and how you used feedback to improve your teaching; how you incorporated your own current applications to cutting-edge research, etc.

FASE encourages experimentation and innovation in teaching, and so these should be described. FASE also encourages continuing development of teaching skills, and so individuals should describe any training (e.g., CTSI workshops, menteeship, etc.) they have undergone, and how they may have adapted their teaching/course to this.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.engineering.utoronto.ca/files/2022/02/10-TMRC-Disc-DRAFT-Teaching-Effectiveness-Guidelines.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.aapm.utoronto.ca/academic-administrative-procedures-manual/academic-salary-administration/#PTR>

### **How should course evaluations be used when making PTR decisions?**

First and foremost, PTR decisions should never be based on single ratings from course evaluations. As AAPM further notes, “[i]n interpreting these course evaluations [...] academic administrators should not merely refer to the numerical summaries.” Ratings should *always* be considered in the context of student comments, and the individual’s AAR self-assessment and/or Teaching Dossier. Look for consistency in positive comments, especially those that may reinforce/reference specific criteria or sub-criteria in GAET. Consistently negative comments may be an important sign that the course needs adjustment; however, they may also be a warning sign of implicit or explicit bias, especially if they are inflammatory or *ad hominem*. Since course evaluations are solicited before final exams/grades, things like a tough midterm might bias ratings and comments downwards, so PTR committees should be wary of comments that focus exclusively on graded aspects of the course. There is also strong evidence in the literature that teaching evaluations are biased against women and members of marginalized groups.<sup>e.g., 3,4</sup>

Courses with substantial changes/innovation may also not be rated highly, at least initially, so course evaluations should *always* be viewed in context of instructor-described teaching innovations and self-assessment. The type of course and instructor role also provides important context, as AAPM notes: “*is the course new or repeated; is it compulsory or elective; is it introductory or advanced; is it multi-sectioned or individual and what role did the instructor play in its development; is it required for a program or optional; was the instructor experimenting with new teaching techniques, means of delivery, technology or material?*”

In conclusion, per AAPM, “*these kinds of considerations will encourage experimentation in teaching and ensure that no penalty will result from taking intellectual risks and recognize that many variables can be related to teaching evaluations by students.*” That said, early-career faculty may understandably feel reluctant to experiment too broadly in their classroom teaching and should not be penalized for taking a cautious approach.

### **Is teaching effectiveness evaluated differently for tenure vs. teaching stream?**

As detailed in GAET, criteria for *effectiveness* in teaching are broadly similar for tenure vs. teaching stream. For teaching stream, however, AAPM notes that “[a] separate weighting of teaching, pedagogical/professional development and service should be made [and] faculty members shall be evaluated on their pedagogical and/or discipline-based scholarship in relation to the field in which they teach and/or creative/professional activity that allows the faculty member to maintain a mastery of their subject area and this evaluation will be appropriately weighted in the PTR assessment.”

More generally, for both streams, AAPM also notes, “[t]he PTR scheme allows each unit to determine the balance amongst the three principal components of a faculty member’s activities, teaching, research and service. This flexibility is important for recognizing the unique missions of units and the differences in agreed upon activities of individuals. [...] Weighting of faculty members on research and study leave should reflect the research or pedagogical/professional development and/or discipline-based scholarship in relation to the field in which they teach and/or creative professional activity that allows the faculty member to maintain a mastery of their subject area<sup>2</sup> and service duties undertaken during their leave.”

### **Is student supervision evaluated in PTR as part of “teaching” or “research”?**

According to the U of T Policy and Procedures on Academic Appointments (PPAA), “*Effectiveness in teaching is demonstrated in [. . .] situations such as counselling students and directing graduate students in the preparation of theses. It is, however, recognized that scholarship must be manifested in the teaching function and that a dogmatic attempt to separate ‘scholarship’ and ‘teaching’ is somewhat artificial*” (PPAA, III.13.b). Thus, in PTR decisions, for both tenure and teaching stream instructors, supervising undergraduate and graduate students may be considered as teaching *or* as research/scholarship, albeit with the understanding that a specific instance of supervision cannot be counted as both teaching and research/scholarship in an AAR. Additionally, teaching stream instructors may or may not be expected to supervise students, depending on their unit’s curriculum and culture; thus, PTR committees should consider each instructor’s situation individually.

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<sup>3</sup> Mengel et al. 2019, DOI: 10.1093/jeea/jvx057

<sup>4</sup> Kreitzer and Sweet-Cushman 2021, DOI: 10.1007/s10805-021-09400-w