The Rhodes University Policy on the Evaluation of Teaching and Course Design

Policy Volume	Teaching and Learning
Policy Chapter	Four
Responsible Committee/Unit/Division/Faculty	Teaching and Learning Committee
Responsible Chairperson/Director/Manager	DVC: Academic and Student Affairs
Dates of First and Subsequent Council Approvals	June 2019
Revision History: Approved Reviews	2019
Review Cycle (e.g. every 2/5/7 years etc)	5 years
Next Review Date	2024

1. POLICY PARTICULARS

1.1. Policy Title	Evaluation of Teaching and Course Design
1.2. Policy Statement (State in a single paragraph the policy mandate and how this relates to the University Mission and Vision)	The purpose of this policy is to guide the evaluation of teaching and course design at Rhodes University. Evaluation is key to ongoing review processes that ensure that teaching and learning are relevant to ever changing contexts.
1.3. Reason for Policy (What this policy aims to achieve)	Evaluation is a complex process involving more than the collection of feedback from students on teaching and course design. Students' experiences and perceptions offer just one perspective on an academic's teaching or the design of a course and thus need to be balanced by those of others. A robust evaluation will therefore involve eliciting a number of perspectives in order that they may be considered against each other to arrive at any judgements and decisions that are made about the teaching or course design in question. This means that, typically, perspectives need to be elicited from academic experts (for example, external examiners or academic peers) as well as from students. In the case of student perceptions, it can be useful to canvas the views of students other than those who are currently enrolled in a course or who are currently experiencing an individual's teaching, since experiences are often tempered by hindsight, maturity and the ability to reflect back on the basis of subsequent experience. Importantly, it is also critical to take into account the perspectives and perceptions of those responsible for the teaching and course design itself. This kind of data can be complemented by insights from other sources. Empirical data related to course success and throughput rates over a period of three or more years can, for example, provide insights into the way a course has functioned as a student body has changed. Similarly, the use of theory and research can be used to challenge or affirm assumptions that underpin course design or teaching itself. Part of the complexity of evaluation also relates to the tensions inherent within it. Evaluation aims both to assure and enhance quality. As a means of assuring quality, evaluation calls on the need for individuals and departments to be accountable to the institution, students, peers and other stakeholders whilst, at the same time, requiring that both are protected from its misuse. When used in relation to teaching, evaluation aims to contribute to the ongoing professional development of individuals, who are the most valuable resource in a university. This requires 'safe spaces' to be created for academic teachers to try out new approaches without fear that evaluation will be

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<tr><td></td><td>detrimental to them as individuals and, critically, for support to be made available not only for the development of those new approaches but also for problems that may arise as a result of their implementation.

As well as being complex and fraught with tensions, evaluation is also an enormously time and resource consuming process. In a context where time and resources are scarce, pressure is exerted to ensure that evaluative work is planned and executed efficiently and effectively.</td></tr>
<tr><td>1.4. People affected by this Policy
(e.g. All units of the University)</td><td>All teaching staff
All students</td></tr>
<tr><td>1.5. Who should read this Policy
(People who need to heed this policy to fulfil their duties)</td><td>All teaching staff
All students</td></tr>
<tr><td>1.6. Website address/link for this Policy</td><td>https://www.ru.ac.za/institutionalresearchplanningqualitypromotion/policies/</td></tr>
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2. RELATED DOCUMENTS FORMS AND TOOLS

(University Policies, Protocols and Documents (such as rules/policies/protocols/guidelines related to this policy)

Relevant Legislation (Legislation/Regulatory requirements/Organisational Reports – name these)
Higher Education Act of 1997
Related Policies
Teaching and Learning Policy
Related Protocols
Forms and Tools (documents to be completed in support of this policy implementation)
E.g. Policy template for the policy itself. Documents pertaining to procedures for implementation, as well as monitoring and evaluation of the policy. Brief Guide to the Evaluation of Teaching and Courses Rhodes University Ethical Standards Committee (RUESC): Guidelines on the ethical use of student data in teaching and learning

3. POLICY DEFINITIONS

(Technical or Conceptual terms used in the policy)

TERM	DEFINITION
Evaluation	This refers to the elicitation of perceptions of a course or module from a number of perspectives (for example, students, peers, external examiners, self). These perceptions are then balanced against each

	other in order to try to identify strengths and weaknesses. Empirical data related to success or throughput rates and theory and research are also used in this process.
Teaching Evaluation	This refers to the elicitation of perceptions of an individual's teaching from a number of perspectives (students, peers, self). These perceptions are then balanced against each other in order to try to identify strengths and weaknesses.
Course Review	This term refers to the evaluation processes undertaken within a department to ensure that a course is relevant and meeting its students' needs.
Evaluation Report	This term refers to a reflective document in which insights from data are balanced against each other in order to arrive at a more complete understanding of the object being evaluated.
Course	At Rhodes University, this refers to the period of teaching and learning either taking place over a semester or over an entire academic year. Courses are housed within departments.
Module	This term refers to a part of a course focusing on a particular topic or taught by a particular academic.
Formative Evaluation	Refers to evaluation conducted with the intent of identifying problems and improving practice in progress.
Summative evaluation	Refers to evaluation conducted at the end of a course in order to make judgements about its overall effectiveness and to make improvements for the next time it is offered.

4. PRINCIPLES GOVERNING THIS POLICY

OVERVIEW
Rhodes University strives to carry out the following, as far as is reasonably practicable:
1. Given the complexity and tensions inherent to evaluation, this policy acknowledges that evaluation tools which take the form of 'one size fits all' surveys that attempt to measure courses against a single set of criteria or to rank individuals against each other are not able to probe the diversity of course design or approaches to teaching within the institution.
2. Evaluation is best conceived as a process of: i) academics identifying salient aspects of their teaching or course design along with the beliefs and theories which underpin them; ii) designing and asking questions which will allow them to observe the impact of teaching and course design and the validity of the assumptions about learning which underpin them; iii) reflecting on the implications of what they have learned from analysis of the data for both practice and its underpinning theory.
3. All data collection by staff and students, including feedback data, should be done in ways which adhere to ethical principles of respect, dignity, transparency, accountability and integrity.

4. Evaluative data can be generated using a variety of procedures including survey questionnaires, focus group interviews, and observations of teaching by peers and other more informal methods. Some data (for example, the reports of external examiners or analyses of student performance) becomes available as the result of routine academic tasks.

5. Evaluations need to be captured in the form of a written report that identifies problems that need to be addressed and strengths that need to be built upon and which puts plans in place for achieving these.

6. A distinction needs to be made between the evaluation of teaching and the evaluation of course design. The evaluation of teaching is aimed at the development of an individual's teaching. It is therefore understood as a personal process requiring the establishment of a 'safe space' to experiment and try without fear of censure. A course evaluation, on the other hand, is aimed at ensuring that the course is 'fit for purpose' in the sense that it meets the goals identified for it and the needs of its students. Course evaluation is therefore a more public process aimed at accountability.

7. Evaluation reports can be included as evidence submitted by individual academic teachers as they attempt to show they meet the criteria for teaching at the end of a period of probation or as appendices to course statements provided by course co-ordinators at the end of each year.

8. HoDs can request academic teachers to provide evidence of evaluation when, for example, problems are identified by students. HoDs cannot undertake evaluation of a staff member's teaching without consultation with the staff member.

5. DIRECTIVES FOR IMPLEMENTING THIS POLICY
(Actions and processes by which the objectives of the policy will be achieved.)

Directive 1: All academic teachers will evaluate their practice as teachers on an ongoing basis in order to contribute to their own development in this area of work.

Directive 2: Courses will be evaluated on an ongoing basis. They will be evaluated formatively as they are running in order to identify problems and address them and summatively as they end in order to judge their effectiveness.

Directive 3: Evaluations will be included in course coordinator reports provided to HoDs and Deans at the end of each year.

6. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES
(Roles and responsibilities of Key personal/Divisions/Faculties/Departments)

ROLE	RESPONSIBILITY
ROLE 1	Academic teachers are responsible for evaluating their teaching on an ongoing basis in order to identify areas for improvement. These evaluations will then be submitted in the portfolios of evidence that individuals meet criteria for teaching at the end of probationary periods and in personal promotion processes.
ROLE 2	Course coordinators are responsible for evaluating courses. These evaluations will be submitted alongside other evidence in support of course coordinator statements made at the end of each academic year.

ROLE 3	HoDs are responsible for ensuring that i) academics evaluate their teaching on an ongoing basis and ii) course coordinators evaluate the courses for which they are responsible.
ROLE 4	CHERTL is responsible for providing support for evaluation processes and the interpretation of results as well as for ongoing support when problems are identified.

CONTACTS (Please see Appendix A)

Direct any questions about the policy to the relevant Office-bearers, designations and contact details are listed in Appendix A.

HoD CHERTL

DVC Academic and Students Affairs

POLICY REVIEW PROCEDURE

(Actions and processes by which the policy will be reviewed)

Policy approval and review will take the following route: 1. Teaching and Learning Committee 2. Faculty Boards 3. Senate 4. Council
The Policy will normally be reviewed every FIVE years.
Communication of the review process

LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

CONTACTS

(Direct any questions about the policy to the relevant Office-bearers; designations and contact details are listed below)

Area of Concern	Division/Faculty/Department	Telephone	Email
Guidance on implementation	CHERTL	8171	Chertl-admin@ru.ac.za