

THE RHODES UNIVERSITY POLICY ON THE EVALUATION OF TEACHING AND COURSES

1. POLICY PARTICULARS

DATE OF APPROVAL BY RELEVANT COMMITTEE STRUCTURE: 14 October 2004

DATE OF APPROVAL BY SENATE: 29 October 2004

DATE OF APPROVAL BY COUNCIL: 9 December 2004

COMMENCEMENT

DATE: 9 December 1994

REVISION HISTORY: First revision effective 1 January 2005

REVIEW DATE: Every three years

POLICY LEVEL: All academic staff

RESPONSIBILITY [Person/Division/Committee accountable for]:

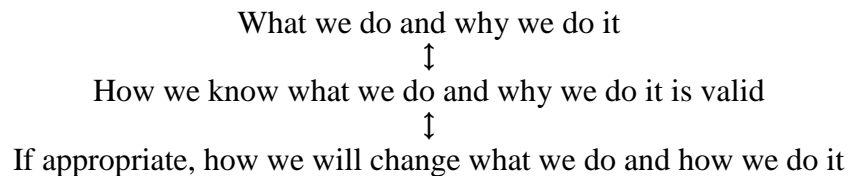
- IMPLEMENTATION & MONITORING: All academic staff;
Academic Development Centre;
Academic Review Committee
- REVIEW AND REVISION: Teaching and Learning Committee

REPORTING STRUCTURE: Academic Development Centre → Teaching and Learning Committee → Senate → Council

2. POLICY STATEMENT

2.1 POLICY DECLARATION:

Evaluation of teaching and of courses is essential as a foundation for continuing professional and educational development within the University and as a base for institutional and national quality assurance systems. In order to assure the quality of its teaching and courses and to ensure the University is able to fulfil its mission, the University needs to be able to demonstrate:



University lecturers are expected to be intrinsically motivated to teach well as a matter of professional duty and pride. The University places responsibility for the evaluation of teaching and course design on lecturers and departments. In addition, the University recognizes that evaluation is a complex activity which needs to be understood as a form of research into teaching and course design rather than a bureaucratic necessity.

In designing evaluations, departments/individuals need to be cognizant of the tension between the need to be accountable, the need to protect individuals from the misuse of evaluation and the need for evaluation to contribute to on-going professional development and the enhancement of quality. In order to balance this tension, the University makes a distinction between the evaluation of courses and modules and the evaluation of teaching.

2.2 POLICY OBJECTIVES:

This policy aims to ensure that:

- Courses and teaching are evaluated on an on-going basis in a thoughtful and rigorous manner in order to **both** assure and enhance quality.
- Evaluation of courses is available to feed into programme review cycles.
- Staff are aware of their responsibilities regarding evaluation, and of the support available to them through the Academic Development Centre.
- Feedback is provided to students and staff appropriately

- Uninterpreted raw evaluation data should not be used to the detriment of individuals.

2.3 DEFINITIONS:

Course Review refers to the internal self evaluation procedures undertaken within a department.

Programme Review refers to the internal self evaluation procedures undertaken at institutional level. At Rhodes this relates to the academic review procedures in which entire departments are reviewed.

Course evaluation 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.

Teaching evaluation 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 refers to either a year or semester long period of teaching directed at a particular year level.

Module refers to a portion of a course. Modules may vary in length.

Evaluation Report refers to a document in which sets of data from different sources are balanced against each other in order to arrive at a more complete understanding of the course being evaluated than if only one set of data (student perception surveys, for example) were considered.

3. POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

3.1 THE ACTIONS AND PROCESSES BY WHICH THE OBJECTIVES OF THE POLICY WILL BE ACHIEVED:

In South Africa, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) places primary responsibility for quality with institutions of higher education and sees its own role as the validation of self-evaluation reports (HEQC Founding Document, 2001). This means that the ability of an institution, and of individuals within that institution, to evaluate performance forms the core of all quality assurance procedures.

Evaluation activities have to be designed in a way which will take account of the need to assure minimum standards as well as of the need to acknowledge that teaching and course design are often highly individualized activities dependent on diverse disciplinary and local contexts as well as on characteristics inherent to lecturers/course designers themselves. The University therefore recognizes that evaluation tools which take the form of 'one size fits all' surveys are unlikely to be able to probe the diversity of course design/approaches to teaching in use within the institution. Although some questions designed to ensure that minimum standards are met will need to be answered on a regular basis, evaluation is best conceived as a process of lecturers (1) identifying salient aspects of their teaching or course design along with the beliefs and theories which underpin them (2) 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 (3) reflecting on the implications of what they have learned from analysis of the data for both practice and its underpinning theory.

Although the elicitation of students' perceptions of teaching and course design will probably comprise the primary evaluation mechanism, it is important to balance the opinions of students with those of peers (including external examiners) and those of the course designers or individual teachers. The University therefore makes a distinction between *data* which, in this case, are defined as the perceptions of one perspective and an *evaluation* in which different perspectives are balanced against each other in order to arrive at a more complete understanding of the teaching or course being evaluated.

Evaluation can be accomplished using a variety of procedures including survey questionnaires, focus group interviews and other more informal methods of collecting data. Ideally, evaluations need to be captured in the form of a written report which identifies problems which need to be addressed and strengths which need to be built upon and which makes a plan for achieving these. These written reports could be included in teaching portfolios or, in the case of course evaluations, could be stored in a box file with other documentation related to the course.

Eliciting the opinions and perceptions of others necessarily takes time. This means that it is important to feed back information and insights gained from evaluation to the people who have been consulted. This is especially the case for students who might otherwise not be motivated to complete questionnaires or take part in other forms of evaluation.

For evaluation to be conducted in a thoughtful and rigorous manner, it is necessary to provide support for the design of evaluations and evaluation instruments and for their analysis. In addition, staff need to be supported in addressing problems and issues arising from evaluation. The University undertakes to provide this support by means of the services of the Academic Development Centre.

In order to ensure that the University is able to monitor and review the overall quality of its teaching and courses, departments are required to report on the implementation and outcome of this policy during the regular academic reviews of departments which are held every 3 to 5 years.

3.1.1 Review of Courses

Course/module design and delivery are a relatively more public activity often shared by two or more people. The evaluation of courses is therefore acknowledged as having an accountability function, and is therefore open to public scrutiny. Course/module evaluation, moreover, needs to form part of more wide-scale evaluation and audit procedures intended to assure quality at higher levels. Course/module evaluation needs to be both formative and summative. Formative evaluation, which takes place while the course is still being offered or teaching is still taking place, allows problems and issues to be addressed while there is still time for students to benefit from improvements. Summative evaluation is aimed at gaining an overall picture of the course or teaching after the event so that decisions can be made for the future. Course/module evaluation will normally be designed and implemented by course co-ordinators in collaboration with lecturers offering the modules which make up those courses.

Heads of Departments (or delegated a individual or committee) are responsible for:

- Developing an evaluation strategy which, as a minimum, ensures that courses are evaluated as a whole once every three years as a means of ensuring quality
- Providing details of these plans to staff in the department
- Ensuring that courses or modules which have undergone development or in which problems have been identified are evaluated on a “needs” basis
- Informing staff when any additional evaluations are conducted
- Ensuring that insights arising from evaluation are acted upon to enhance and assure quality in course design
- Ensuring that insights from evaluation and the actions which will result from them are communicated to students and other stakeholders.
- Ensuring that evaluations are written up in a way which will allow them to feed into academic reviews and institutional audits.

Individual lecturers are responsible for:

- Evaluating the modules or parts of courses that they teach when this forms part of the course evaluation strategy
- Responding to insights from evaluation
- Making results from evaluation of modules or courses available to course coordinators and HoDs when requested.
- Informing students of the insights from evaluation and the actions which will result from them.

Heads of Departments can:

- Request course evaluations which are additional to those identified in the evaluation strategy to be conducted where deemed necessary
- Ask to see evaluation reports *accompanied by raw data* where deemed necessary.

The Academic Development Centre is responsible for providing support for:

- Designing evaluations
- Collecting evaluation data
- Analysing the data from the evaluations
- Providing written reports on those evaluations.

3.2.2 Evaluation of Teaching

The University understands the evaluation of teaching to be aimed primarily at individual professional development which then contributes to the assurance and enhancement of quality. Individuals are required to evaluate their teaching on an on-going basis and to provide evidence of having done so to Heads of Departments in the form of a teaching portfolio which describes and documents evaluation processes and which details plans to address weaknesses and build on strengths.

Evaluation of their teaching enables lecturers to identify areas for improvement and also strengths which can be built upon. Regular evaluation of teaching also assists lecturers to make realistic claims about the quality of their teaching when applying for confirmation in a post or promotion.

Individual lecturers are responsible for:

- Designing evaluations which will allow them to test the validity of their assumptions about teaching and their practice as teachers on a continuous basis
- Making plans and taking action to address any problem areas identified in their teaching and to build on teaching strengths
- Providing evidence of the quality of their teaching to Heads of Departments in the form of an evaluation report when required to do so.

Heads of Departments can:

- Require an individual lecturer to evaluate his/her teaching of a particular course or module as deemed necessary
- Ask for a discussion of the evaluation or request an evaluation report.

The Academic Development Centre is responsible for providing support for:

- Designing evaluations
- Collecting evaluation data
- Analysing the data from the evaluations
- Providing written reports on those evaluations.

Further guidance and practical advice on the evaluation of teaching and courses is available at

<http://www.ru.ac.za/academic/adc/evalguide.htm>

3.2 REVIEW PROCEDURE:

The Teaching and Learning Committee shall review the policy every 3 years, by June of the relevant year. Any proposed revisions would need to be considered by faculties before approval by Senate and Council. As and when the policy is revised, the latest version will be distributed by the Secretariat to all Heads of Departments who shall be responsible for communicating the changes to staff in their departments. The Committee Secretariat will also ensure that the web version remains updated.