Faculty Senate Working Group on Teaching
J. F. Young (Chair), E. Cox, G. Shah, and R. Stevenson

Charge: to examine the structures at Rice that support, encourage, and reward effective undergraduate teaching, and to suggest changes as appropriate.

Implicit in our charge is that excellent teaching, student learning, and student mentoring are high priorities at Rice, and that we should use multiple means to achieve those goals: effective evaluation of outcomes, support to improve faculty practice, and rewards for achievement, including teaching awards, and consideration of teaching effectiveness in performance reviews and in appointment, promotion and tenure decisions.

This report summarizes the first part of our charge, examining current practice. Our work was guided by a set of questions included as Appendix A. Not all of those questions are answered in this report; our work is ongoing, and we welcome our colleagues’ suggestions of new questions.

Rice Student Course Survey
The exclusive tool for evaluating course effectiveness and faculty teaching effectiveness is the Rice Student Course Survey. The origins of the survey are lost, but it was being used campus-wide, with the questions we have now, sometime before 1980. The Registrar’s website has spreadsheets with course evaluations from Fall 2001 through Spring 2008; summaries of information for each class from 1995 to 1998 are available in Fondren Library (not cataloged), and partial records for 1981-1985 are available, with permission from the President’s Office, in the Woodson Research Center, Fondren Library. The Registrar says he has seen data from the 1960s, with the same questions.

There is extensive research that shows student surveys provide valid assessment data that is very well correlated with other measures. The utility of the information obtained, of course, depends on the structure of the survey, the questions asked and their relation to the information desired. It is not clear how the questions on the Rice Survey were selected, but they appear to take an outward focus common in the 1980s, and are similar to questions on many other student surveys. Students are asked to make judgments about the overall quality of the course, specific aspects of the course, and its instructor. (Inward focus surveys, developed in the 1990’s, ask students about their own progress in meeting a set of learning objectives.)

About a year ago, Randy Batsell and Rick Stoll analyzed the Rice survey to determine how many independent factors about a course and an instructor it provides. An analysis of the 32,776 student responses for the 13 rating items in 2004 revealed the survey really captured only two underlying dimensions, the general effectiveness of the instructor and the general effectiveness of the course. The 2006 data with 15,030 student
responses gathered on line yielded the same two factors. This empirical evidence suggests that we can reduce the number of questions and still provide the same quality of information, and add questions that reveal other data.

**Other Course Surveys** The course survey that is most widely used and that has the most extensive validation is the IDEA survey. IDEA is commercial firm that provides evaluation services; its survey has been adopted by about 150 colleges and universities. The IDEA system has an inward focus, and is based on a two step process in which faculty first identify learning objectives for their course from a list of 12, and then students are asked to self-assess their progress on these (and other) objectives. An overall assessment of teaching effectiveness is based on a score which weights reported progress on important objectives more than less important objectives. This is a very different approach from the one Rice takes, and suggests the question, “Does the Rice survey measure what we want to know?” Or even, “What do we want to know about teaching and courses?” Surveys that take an outward approach, like Rice’s, seem to measure teaching practices rather than teaching or learning effectiveness.

**Changing the Rice Survey** The Rice Course Survey is administered using a survey function in the Banner computer system that was not expressly designed for student course surveys. The technical team has worked successfully to adapt it to meet most of our needs, but there are limits. Certainly the questions could be changed. It may be possible to add a modest degree of customization, to allow an instructor, department, or School to add specific questions to the survey for their courses. It is probably not possible for instructors to use the system to administer formative surveys to their students during the semester to make course corrections. SurveyMonkey.com is an excellent tool for this; perhaps Rice should have a site license rather than trying to reinvent the wheel.

**Using the Rice Survey** While experts agree that student course surveys can provide valid information on teaching and course effectiveness, they also agree that personnel decisions (salary, promotions, etc.) should not be based solely on a single measure, and certainly not on the written comments on surveys. Most suggest that such decisions be based on a combination of student evaluations, peer evaluations, and personal evaluations (a teaching portfolio), which together give a more complete and balanced picture to those making the decision. Discrepancies between the three should be resolved with additional investigations. As summarized below, Rice uses student evaluations almost exclusively, when teaching performance is included at all.

**Teaching Effectiveness in Performance Reviews**
Rice University Faculty Policy No. 214-03 specifies procedures for the continuing evaluation of the professional growth of each teaching member of the faculty. In summary, department chairs hold a periodic performance review with all departmental
Teaching Effectiveness in the Promotion & Tenure Process

The document “Guidelines for Faculty Appointments, Promotion, Tenure, and Renewal of Contracts,” specifies the procedures and necessary documents for promotion of tenure line faculty governed by the Appointments, Promotion and Tenure policies #201-97 and #201-01. It does not establish policy, but the Promotion and Tenure (P&T) Committee considers the guidelines to follow historical practice and to be fully

Non-Tenure Track Teaching Faculty Policy No. 214-03 states that an evaluation of full or part time non-tenure track (NTT) teaching faculty on annual appointment will accompany any recommendation for reappointment, and that student evaluations will be considered sufficient data. This presumably also applies to teaching faculty on multi-year appointments. There seems to be considerable variation in the evaluation procedure for contract NTT teaching faculty; we do not have any evidence that peer reviews are used except in the Shepherd School; some units have asked for teaching portfolios, and some may use student input beyond course surveys. There does not seem to be a specific policy for NTT teaching faculty with continuing appointments, such as lecturers, or Professors of the Practice. It is not clear if Rice University Human Resources Policy No. 433-94, Performance Appraisal, which applies to all staff who are eligible for benefits, applies to NTT teaching faculty with continuing appointments. It is likely that most departments evaluate NTT teaching faculty with continuing appointments in the same way that they do tenure line faculty, but presumably the review focuses almost exclusively on teaching performance. However, we have no data on what additional information is used.

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consistent with those policies. In particular, the Guidelines are quite specific about what documents should be, and can be, in the candidate’s promotion dossier.

Documentation of teaching effectiveness is included in two places. The dossier contains information about the department’s promotion review, including an abstract summarizing, “The candidate’s teaching record at Rice, including a summary of courses taught, student evaluations for each, new courses implemented, courseware developed, department assessments of teaching, and any other relevant information.” (Section B.4.b(1c)). This seems quite a tall order for an abstract that also summarizes eight other characteristics; the Guidelines do not state who prepares this abstract.

A candidate can also include, “A report on teaching and educational objectives, of no more than two pages, in which the candidate reflects on the distinctive aspects of his or her teaching career and practice; service courses taught, curricular innovations, role as mentor to graduate or undergraduate students, special efforts to help students with writing or oral presentations, integrating teaching and research, and so on.” (Section B.4.b(8)). We have requested, but have not received, information on how strictly this two page limit is enforced. Have candidates submitted more, or asked to? Would a modest teaching portfolio of 5 or 10 pages be acceptable? Can the department include more information about the candidate’s teaching contributions? There is no page limit on the material used to document research effectiveness and scholarship, and it usually fills several binders.

The next stage of the promotion process occurs when the full dossier has been compiled. The tenured departmental faculty review the proposal, and one of the nine questions to be addressed is, “What has been the individual’s teaching performance, and what is their potential for improvement? This evaluation should, among others, be based on the following: student teaching evaluations, departmental evaluations, letters from students, prizes and awards for teaching, record in mentoring graduate and undergraduate students, implementation of new courses, novel deployment of information technology for teaching, and curriculum development.” (Section B.4.b The review, 5.) This is an impressive list of criteria, but it is not clear how they could be documented for review, e.g., student letters, in an abstract and a two page statement.

With departmental approval the promotion case and dossier moves to the Dean’s office. Different Schools have different procedures, but the School can conduct an additional review along the line of the department’s, and can request additional information, such as letters from faculty in the department or School. These letters certainly could ask for information about teaching activities and performance.

With School approval the promotion case and dossier moves to the Provost’s office and the P&T Committee. At this point a third piece of evidence is added regarding the candidate’s teaching effectiveness. The University Teaching Committee prepares a
summary of the student course reviews, the written comments, from courses the
candidate has taught. Three members of the Teaching Committee read each candidate’s
course reviews and prepare their own summary. Some members comment on each
individual course taught, others write a general summary and evaluation covering all
the courses, noting trends, etc. The reports are usually less than one page long. Even
so, the Committee considers preparing these reports to be its most important and
demanding task. The three reports are added to the candidate’s dossier for
consideration by the P&T Committee. Copies are sent to the candidate, the department,
and the Dean, but they are not available at the earlier stages of departmental and School
review, although anyone, at any time, can read course survey comments and draw their
own conclusions.

The Guidelines are very vague on the process by which P&T reaches its decision.
We know from those that have served that it is a very time consuming process, that it is
taken very seriously, and that it can be emotional and stressful. Their review is not
strictly limited to the dossier, but can, and usually does, include interviews with
relevant persons, collection of additional information, and extensive discussions. In the
end, there is some type of vote. There is a general consensus that the Committee
considers the candidate’s accomplishments in three primary areas: scholarship,
teaching, and service, but there is no formal or nominative guidance regarding how
these factors should be weighted. That is, P&T members do not rank a candidate on
each area (say from Excellent to Not Acceptable), and then weight the three scores and
combine them for a total evaluation. Perhaps some Committee members do that
informally in their mind as they decide how to vote. It is interesting to speculate on
what the weights would be if such a procedure were used. One way to approximate an
answer is to count the relative number of pages in the dossier devoted to scholarship,
teaching, and service, or to literally weigh them to get a weight. Given the information
we have, that answer would be an extraordinarily discouraging assessment for the
importance we think we place on teaching effectiveness at Rice. We probably all have
our thoughts about what the informal weights are at Rice and at other institutions. It
would be an even more interesting discussion to debate what they should be.

Teaching Awards
Teaching awards are the most public and prominent indication of the value Rice places
on teaching. The primary teaching awards given by Rice are the George R. Brown
Awards, given annually every year at graduation since 1967. They are funded by an
endowment from the Brown Foundation, which also provides funds in support of
innovative teaching projects and the administration of the teaching surveys at the end
of each semester. The Brown Awards are based on voting by alumni who graduated
with four-year undergraduate degrees two and five years previously. There is one
Excellence in Teaching award, currently worth $6,500, and six Superior awards,
currently pegged at $2,000. The administration of the balloting is handled by the Dean of Undergraduates. Paper ballots are mailed (example in Appendix B) to about 1300 alumni each spring; about 13% are returned because of incorrect addresses. Data for the years 1998-2007, covering the classes of 1993-2002, indicate a response rate from 11 to 20 percent, or 140 to 260 ballots; the total number of faculty receiving votes on those ballots in any year ranges from 153 to 222. The low response rate and large number of faculty named combine so that no faculty member receives very many votes. For example, the recipient of the 2008 award for Excellence in Teaching received a total of 18 votes, while one of the Superior Awards garnered 13 votes. For 2007, the top recipient obtained 26 votes. The ballots are tallied and the final selection is made by a committee composed of the Provost, the Dean of Undergraduates, and one academic dean. The number of votes received is not scaled in any way to account for the number of classes a faculty member has taught or the enrollment in those classes. We do not know the source of the procedure for selecting the Brown awards, particularly if it was specified in the original endowment, or if it can be changed. Non tenure track teaching faculty are not eligible for the Brown awards.

There are a few other teaching awards in addition to the Brown Awards. A single Nicholas Salgo Outstanding Teacher Award is given each year, funded by the Noren-Salgo Foundation and Rice University. It has been given since 1966, based on votes by students in the current junior and senior classes. The same committee and procedures are used as for the Brown awards. We do not have data regarding student response rate, number of faculty named, etc. At the very least, the addresses of current students are more likely to be correct (if they want their diplomas). There are also a few specialized awards, Sarofim Teaching Awards for Lecturers in the Humanities, the only award specifically targeted to NTT faculty, a Phi Beta Kappa teaching award, and additional awards in the Jones School. The Phi Beta Kappa award targets non-tenured assistant professors and the selection is based on student course survey results, including the comments.

Rice regularly nominates its faculty for two external, national teaching awards. The Committee on Teaching prepares dossiers each year for the Piper Teaching Award, and the CASE Teaching Award. The candidates are suggested by the members of the committee and a campus-wide call for nominations. Undoubtedly, Schools, departments, and individual faculty nominate excellent teachers for the external awards given by many professional societies and organizations, but this process is not institutionalized, even to the extent of keeping a data base of such awards.

Advising and mentoring students is also a part of teaching, and Rice recognizes such service in two ways. The Presidential Mentoring Award has been given since at least 2003. The President’s Office solicits nominations from graduate students and faculty,
which must contain at least one letter of support from a mentee of the nominee. Nominations are carried forward to future years. The award is announced at graduation. Each year the student body selects, by vote, one faculty member for "The Mentor Recognition Award for Extraordinary Service to the Student Body as Friend and Advisor." It is presented at the graduation concert before commencement and consists of a glass plaque, which is either quite large or has small engraving. The Residential Colleges recognize the service of their Associates, Faculty, Rice, and Community, through awards given at the end of the year, usually at the College Associates Night Dinner. Each College awards one Outstanding Faculty Associate Award, which includes a $1000 payment. The Colleges also award a variable number of Superior Associate awards, which sometimes include a small gift. The recipients of Associate Awards are honored at a reception at the President’s house, hosted by the Dean of Undergraduates. The procedures for picking the Associate Awards vary by college, but generally involve a student committee guided by the Masters, often the associates committee, that requests nominations from College members. Some of the criteria are serving as a divisional advisor, a consistent presence in the College, sponsoring events and parties, and supplying lots of food. While not a prize, the administration provides $5000 annually to each college Master to distribute among its faculty divisional advisors as a recognition of their service.

Professional Development of Faculty

The Rice Student Course Survey provides information to a faculty member on her or his teaching effectiveness. However, Rice provides almost no support to help faculty members improve their effectiveness. Unlike almost all public universities, and most of our peer private schools, Rice does not have a Center for Teaching and Learning to provide resources in teaching techniques and skills, to provide help developing new courses, or for effectively using technology; there is no fund to attend teaching workshops or conferences. The Rice orientation for new faculty contains no information or workshop on effective teaching, nor on how to quickly start a successful academic career. We have training classes for our maintenance staff on how to clean, but not for our faculty on how to teach. If the lack of such resources is based on the assumption that all faculty have had training in teaching before coming to Rice, that faith is sadly misplaced. As Richard Felder, a national proponent and practioner of faculty development, says, “College teaching may be the only skilled profession for which no preparation or training is provided or required.”

There is some specific help for faculty members seeking to improve their teaching. Classroom Technology Services (CTS) was created in August, 1999 to help faculty who want to use technology in their teaching. They give regular seminars on issues such as using OWL-Space and the classroom computer podiums. They will video tape your lecture, but not help you analyze your performance. The Dean of Graduate and
Postdoctoral Studies sponsors occasional noon-time lectures on teaching topics given by Rice faculty. Graduate students who attend a certain number of lectures receive a certificate. The Deans have occasionally sponsored a speaker on teaching or education, or a teaching workshop. The Cain Project in the School of Engineering worked with faculty to help them incorporate communication skills in their courses, and one year sponsored a visiting professor from the University of Wisconsin’s Center for Teaching and Learning. He gave weekly seminars, attended mostly by graduate students, and offered individual help to faculty. The Cain Project no longer exists but the School of Engineering hired two of the staff to help faculty and students with communication skills.

Rice graduate students are not faculty, but many of them aspire to be. Rice often boasts that it does not use TAs or graduate students to teach classes. This statement is inappropriate in several respects. Many departments do use graduate students for significant instructional duties, and in some departments graduate students are listed as the instructor of record for courses. The training and support for such duties varies greatly. In addition, the statement is a poor expression of the underlying goal: that Rice students should be taught only by those with appropriate skills and training. (The statement also implies, with no basis whatsoever, that all faculty have such skills and training.) Finally, a policy of excluding graduate students from teaching experience is not a universal good, as implied. Rice graduate students who wish to enter academic positions are at a competitive disadvantage with respect to other candidates who do have training and/or experience in teaching. Once hired, they still have a disadvantage; studies show that young faculty with teaching skills spend less time developing and delivering courses, have more time for research, and thus do better at both.

Rice graduate students interested in teaching probably have fewer resources than faculty. They can attend the noon lectures mentioned above and get a certificate of attendance. There is a course in pedagogy in the English department, required of their graduate students, and a course in the Philosophy department; in the Fall of 2007 the School of Engineering began offering a graduate course in Teaching Engineering. In addition, some graduate students receive informal instruction through helping faculty with courses, or co-teaching with a faculty member, perhaps running a discussion section or a laboratory. Given the productivity pressures of graduate research, students are hard pressed to find the time for these activities, and some research advisors are less than supportive, or openly forbid it. Most state schools actively use Teaching Assistants, and TA jobs are the sole source of financial support for many of their graduate students. Those schools often require graduate students to take and pass a semester course on teaching before they can be a TA, even they are just supervising a freshman physics, chemistry, or computer laboratory.
Appendix A

Senate Working Group on Teaching Evaluation
Notes; Jim Young, 9/29/08

Rice Course Survey: History
- When did it start being administered? (Registrar’s Office?)
- Where did the questions come from?
- What historical records exist of the results? (Registrar’s Office? Library?)
- Randy has said the survey only reveals three independent factors; can we document this?

Other Course Surveys
- Gather information on survey forms widely used nationally and/or by our peers. Are they validated? Are result norms or comparisons available? (Should we use one of them?)

Evaluating Teaching Effectiveness
- What is the Rice or School policy regarding yearly (or periodic) performance evaluations for faculty? Does it include teaching effectiveness?
- Do the departments/Schools use the course surveys as part of their periodic faculty evaluations, or to revise curriculum?
- Do the departments/Schools use other means (peer reviews, portfolios) as part of their periodic evaluations of faculty teaching effectiveness? Is advising and mentoring students considered?
- How is teaching effectiveness documented for P&T decisions?
  - What material must/should go in the package by the rules? Who prepares?
  - What material can go in if a faculty member wishes (peer reviews, references, teaching portfolio)?
- Is there any formal or nominative guidance as to how teaching effectiveness should be considered or weighed in the P&T decision, relative to research effectiveness and service?
- Consider the above questions with respect to the appointment, re-appointment, and promotion of non-tenure line teaching faculty.
- At some point, can we get information on the above issues at our peer institutions?

Teaching Awards
- How many are there?
- Are they, or can they be, categorized (by amount of award, process, particular factors considered, selection process, etc.)?
- Is there a standard process for picking awardees? What is it, and who does it?
  - If not, why not (donor specification, tradition, etc.)?
  - Are there any problems with adopting a standard process?
• Advising and mentoring students is usually considered part of teaching or academic
duty. Are there specific awards for this activity? Should some of the college
associate awards be considered in this category and normalized?

Professional Development of Faculty
• Document regular efforts by the university, Schools, and departments to improve the
teaching effectiveness of faculty.
• What resources are available to help faculty develop courses, improve courses,
develop new pedagogy, use technology effectively, and improve teaching
effectiveness and efficiency?
• What training does Rice, the Schools, or departments provide to new faculty and
instructors regarding teaching?

Other Questions and Tasks
• What are the technical issues in modifying student course surveys to contain a
limited number of instructor (or department or School) specified questions,
including open ended questions?
• Can the present course survey mechanism track which enrolled students have not
answered a course survey and email reminders? Can it give the instructor a list of
those responding (so he or she could give some extra credit, etc., to encourage
participation)?
• Can the present course survey mechanism be used by instructors to collect mid-
semester course evaluations (formative assessment), using instructor supplied
questions, including tracking respondents? These results would go just to the
instructor. (Or should Rice just sign a contract with SurveyMonkey.com?)
Appendix B

RICE UNIVERSITY
Office of the President
THE GEORGE R. BROWN PROGRAM FOR EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING

Please list below in order of preference the name of the three Rice Faculty members whom you found to be the most outstanding or effective teachers. Your further comments are invited. You may sign your name or not as you wish.

1. ____________________________________________

2. ____________________________________________

3. ____________________________________________

Comments:

Please detach here at perforation and return in envelope.