EVIDENCE OF TEACHING EFFECTIVENESS

The literature on evaluation of teaching supports the view that teaching evaluation should be based on evidence gathered from a variety of sources.

Ratings and comments from students are one useful measure of teaching effectiveness and a valuable source of evidence. Yet best practice in teaching evaluation involves using various measures contextualized over time, especially when the goal of the evaluation is formative; that is, to maintain or improve the quality of teaching. For this purpose, student evaluation data alone are insufficient. Student evaluations need to be complemented by consultation and by data from other sources, such as peer review, ongoing self-assessment and reflection.

At Mount Allison University, teaching evaluation is primarily formative; it is conducted to provide individual faculty members with the information they require to monitor, maintain, and develop the quality and effectiveness of their teaching and their courses.

However, teaching evaluation at Mount Allison has summative applications; i.e., information gathered from evaluation provides valuable evidence of accomplishment in personnel decisions, such as hiring, promoting, granting tenure, and even adjudicating teaching awards. Sound personnel decisions should be based on evidence from a variety of sources: for example, student evaluation data (both numerically scored and narrative); peer reviews; and materials provided by the professor, such as syllabi, sample course handouts, and reflective statements about teaching strategies and outcomes. All of this evidence is best presented within a teaching portfolio.

Using Teaching Evaluations to Improve Teaching

The key to using teaching evaluation data as a springboard to improvements is quite simply to monitor your evaluations over time and look for patterns. It is also useful to conduct midterm evaluations—such as one-minute-papers, stop-start-continue—rather than waiting for the end-of-term results.

For two useful resources on responding to student evaluations for formative purposes, see the following issues of PAIDEIA, the PCTC newsletter:

*Responding to Student Evaluations of your Teaching* (Volume 4, Number 2, Jan, 2009), pp. 6-7.
http://www.mta.ca/pctc/publications/jan,%202009.pdf

*Reading you Student Teaching Evaluations* (Volume 3, Number 3, Feb, 2008), pp. 2-4.
Using Teaching Evaluations for Summative Applications

Without context, teaching evaluation data alone are not sound evidence of teaching effectiveness. That context can be provided by a description of the instructor’s goals for the course, the number of students in the class, the instructional activities, and so on. Similarly, other corroborative evidence, such as materials developed by the instructor, can help readers to interpret the students’ responses. Finally, one set of evaluations from one class is not enough evidence. Evaluation evidence collected over time, in a variety of contexts, is the most persuasive. This is best done in a teaching portfolio.

For more information on portfolios, see the accompanying document, “Documenting Excellence” or visit the University of Saskatchewan’s Teaching Portfolio website <http://www.usask.ca/gmcte/drupal/?q=node/183>.

See also, the accompanying PowerPoint presentation “Presenting Student Evaluation Data.”