

**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY
FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY**

A Tradition of Teaching Excellence

Teaching is the central pillar of the University mission. It follows that each department should maintain a commitment to high quality teaching. The Department of Sociology is strongly committed to and has a long tradition of instructional excellence. Long before it became fashionable, the Department instituted an annual Department Faculty Teaching Award. This award was instituted in 1979 by Chair Michael Armer for whom the award has recently (2002) been renamed (“The Michael Armer Teaching Award”). Department faculty take their teaching very seriously and the criteria employed in selecting the “best teacher” for the year are indicative of that fact. The Awards Committee examines the quality and quantity of a wide variety of teaching dimensions, including: cumulative career student evaluations (SIRS and SUSSAI); effectiveness in unusually demanding classroom settings (e.g., mass sections, core theory and methods courses) and others for which the Department has special commitments (Broward and Bryant Halls); contributions to/use of service learning; contributions to a range of courses spanning both undergraduate and graduate curriculum; the effective use of new instructional technologies; leading and shaping the graduate program; mentoring graduate students; assisting graduate students in their own teaching; directing and serving on master’s and dissertation committees; as well as participation in teaching workshops and research colloquia.

Another important aspect of the Departmental culture reflective of and conducive to teaching excellence is the number of faculty who have received University-level teaching awards over the past decade: Armer; Eberstein; Imershein; Quadagno; Reynolds. Several faculty have received multiple University-level awards: Isaac, Martin, and Orcutt. In number and proportion the Department leads the College in faculty so recognized and is among the more outstanding departments within the University. Other faculty have been honored with University-wide “Teaching Incentive Awards” and innovative service learning distinctions (e.g., Padavic).

The Department fosters a culture of teaching excellence among its graduate students. As a part of the graduate curriculum, the Department requires all graduate students to take the “Teaching Sociology” course before teaching a class on their own. The Department also gives an annual teaching award to the most outstanding graduate student instructor and works with the University-wide Program for Instructional Excellence (PIE). The Department appoints a “Teaching Coordinator” who is responsible for guiding graduate TA’s and promoting a culture of effective teaching through consultation, seminars, and workshops.

Basic Criteria for Peer Evaluation of Teaching

A strong tradition of teaching excellence is established on a culture of practices. The core of collegial practice is the process of peer review that consists of legitimate and shared criteria and is carried out in a climate of mutual support, respect, and trust. The primary criteria employed by the Department in peer evaluation of faculty teaching include qualitative and quantitative dimensions of the following categories:¹

- 1) *Course Repertoire*: The list of courses taught provides an indication of the scope and diversity of instructor's teaching repertoire. There is an expectation that all faculty contribute to the undergraduate and graduate teaching mission and to the special teaching needs of the Department (e.g., core courses, mass sections, honors and other special student populations).
- 2) *Student Evaluations*: Standardized numerical student evaluations (SIRS and SUSSAI).
- 3) *Course Syllabi*: A good syllabus should contain the basic information required by the University (e.g., grading policy, attendance, missed exams, honor code, disabilities), substantive content appropriate to the course, and be organized in a clear and effective manner.
- 4) *Directed Independent Study, Tutorials, Honors Theses*: A record of activity in these categories.
- 5) *Graduate Committees*: A record of activity as director/ member of master's and dissertation committees.
- 6) *Classroom Visitations*: It is College and University policy that all binders of candidates for promotion and tenure shall include documentation from peer classroom visitations (typically referred to as "peer evaluation of teaching").² The Department recognizes peer visitations as one vehicle through which colleagues can learn from each other and share in the art of classroom instruction and thereby deepen the culture and collective commitment to teaching excellence. The peer evaluator is expected to: (a) be as unobtrusive as possible in the visit; (b) complete a standard College form; (c) attach a narrative report; and (d) provide the peer instructor evaluated with a copy of the report and offer to discuss the report with that instructor. The peer evaluator's report shall be placed in the faculty member's evaluation file and be considered as one piece of information used by the Personnel Committee in its annual assessment of the faculty member's teaching performance. All classroom visits used for annual evaluation should be scheduled in a manner consistent with the Collective Bargaining Agreement.

Rank-specific policy on classroom visitations

Graduate Teaching Assistants:

Graduate TA's with sole responsibility for their own classes should have their classrooms visited

¹ Points 1-5 are the major evaluative criteria used by the Provost (see: <http://www.fsu.edu/~acaffair/tenure/tenure4.html>).

² While this language is relatively common, it is important not to reduce "peer evaluation of teaching" to class visitation information alone.

by the Director of Graduate Studies, the Department Teaching Coordinator, the Chair, or other faculty member, at least once a semester. For those aspiring to academic careers, evidence of teaching experience and effectiveness is important. TA's teaching their own sections are, therefore, strongly encouraged to invite faculty, especially those who are members of their dissertation committees or for other reasons likely to write letters for them, to observe their teaching, and complete peer visitation reports.

Untenured Faculty:

The Chair is obligated to observe classroom teaching by untenured faculty at least once a year and urged to do so at least once a semester. Untenured faculty are encouraged to invite other faculty to visit their classrooms and to file peer evaluation reports. A larger collection of reports, from a variety of colleagues, is likely to be more meaningful in a promotion or tenure binder than a smaller number of reports from the Chair alone.

Tenured Associate Professors:

The Chair should visit Associate Professors' classrooms at least once a year. Again, faculty are reminded that a larger collection of reports, from a variety of colleagues, is preferable for promotion binders and more valuable for the feedback it may provide.

Full Professors

Professors are not obligated to have peer visitations. However, the Department strongly encourages that such visitations be arranged among colleagues for purposes of sharing teaching styles and tactics.

Adjunct Faculty:

The University does not require classroom visitations of adjuncts. However, the justification for the use of adjuncts is that they add something to the Department's teaching mission that cannot be delivered otherwise. Therefore, the Department requires that the Chair or the Chair's designee visit adjunct faculty classrooms during the first semester of their appointment and once a year thereafter to determine, in conjunction with student evaluations, if the Department's mission is in fact being enhanced.

A COPY OF THIS POLICY STATEMENT SHALL BE GIVEN TO EACH MEMBER OF THE FACULTY, AND TO EACH GRADUATE STUDENT TA AND ADJUNCT FACULTY MEMBER UPON APPOINTMENT.

Approved by the Departmental Policy Committee
June 10, 2002