USC Teaching Excellence Initiative:

What we did.
What we learned.
Where we are now.
The goal: Build the same infrastructure for teaching as we have for research.

OUR GOAL: BUILD THE SAME INFRASTRUCTURE FOR TEACHING AS WE HAVE FOR RESEARCH
You can see in this image, we already had well established pathways to get our researchers to the top.
We wanted to build out the same pathways to promote teaching excellence.

To build these pathways to teaching excellence, just as with research, we had to:

1. Agree on the criteria for teaching excellence—which lead to our definition.
2. Invest in faculty development to help them reach those criteria.
3. Create a rigorous peer review process.
4. Reward teaching in meaningful and robust ways.
5. And then, ensure each school had similar infrastructure to meaningfully support teaching.
Where the the initiative originate?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Senate</th>
<th>USC Provost</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Provost/Senate Committee</strong> on Teaching and Academic Programs (2016-2017)</td>
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I get asked this questions a lot. I think it reflects the tension within the shared governance model in higher education. Folks don’t want top-down mandates. But bottom-up initiatives, without support from leadership, often don’t go anywhere. Our initiative was born out of Senate, and was then taken up by the Provost. There were three reports that came from faculty task forces and committees. One from the senate, one convened by the Provost, and then a joint Provost/Senate committee. But, even with this shared origin story, we still encountered push back. Mostly from folks who had not been involved in the governance process, and felt blindsided by the change. I’ll talk more about our lessons learned in a bit.
To develop our initiative
We drafted the Model and Initiative from the report recommendations I just mentioned
and used the Faculty Advisory Board for the Center for Excellence in Teaching as our Initiative Advisory Board to help refine our work
Once we had a draft of the initiative in place, we took it on the road to faculty councils and faculty meetings across the university

(SIDE NOTE: There were a few schools where the councils declined the request to come talk to faculty
These tended to be the schools where, later in the process, faculty were most unhappy with what was happening
I believe it was because the only information they had was from memos (which no one reads), and they didn’t have a chance to understand what was happening and have their voices heard.
I strongly recommend finding ways to talk to as many faculty as possible I suggest their input early, and have multiple modes of communication and pathways for them to contribute to the development process)
BACK TO THE SLIDE,
After the initiative was further refined through conversations in our meetings with faculty, we created resources to support it. We then asked the Senate and our Faculty Advisory Board for feedback and input, and made further revisions.
What we learned

Create a central communication hub, and include entire campus from the beginning

I recommend creating a website, the way University of Oregon did, to publicize your initiative and post progress. I suggest making your plans and draft documents public, with multiple communications to the campus directing them to the website. I would create multiple pathways for all faculty, students, and key campus partners to weigh in. Communication is the achilles heel of universities. If you have ideas for creating a good communication plan, it would helpful if you could share those ideas in the chat.
What we learned

Start with **Why should we do this?** → **Definition** → **Reward** → **Evaluation** → **Development**

Don’t rely on governance structures alone: Get out there and talk to people

OUTREACH TO CAMPUS

is where I think we missed the boat

- We relied on the academic senate for approvals and feedback
  - I’m a former Senate President so I believe in Senate processes
  - But, I didn’t realize how many faculty pay zero attention to what the senate does
- We also didn’t involve students in the process
  - They would have provided *good* input and likely *more leverage* for the change

In a do-over, I would hold multiple town halls and small meetings, I would ask faculty councils to lead discussions on this in faculty meetings, and give me feedback

I would gather *much more* input on every aspect of the plan

Starting with asking the question: Why should we do this?
What we learned

We also didn’t connect with other partners until later. That was a mistake.

Partnerships can be Powerful

I would also ensure we found campus partners earlier in the process that could provide various types of leverage (money, access, influence), as well as input and feedback. They could also help us formulate those questions we need to grapple with. We didn’t think about including others beyond the Senate, Provost, and Advisory board until late in the process.

IF YOU HAVE IDEAS ABOUT OTHERS WHO WOULD MAKE POWERFUL ALLIES ON YOUR CAMPUS, PLEASE SHARE THEM IN THE CHAT.
What we learned

We didn’t do this. These questions only came up later when some faculty were protesting the changes. Then they appeared defensive, rather than questions faculty should grapple with.

Start by asking the hard questions to clarify values and direct path

Does teaching matter?
What do we owe our students?
What is good teaching?
How do we know that we are good teachers?
Are they valid? Rigorous?
Should teaching evaluation be rigorous?
How are faculty rewarded for investing their time?
What is the evidence?
Should this change?
Does the university care about educating students?
What metrics are we using?

ASKING THE HARD QUESTIONS

Also, I think we missed the mark by thinking we could take the recommendations from the Senate and implement them, without actively engaging the entire faculty around these issues. There are some senate recommendations where that makes sense. This isn’t one of them.

With, a change this monumental, you really need to go back to the entire faculty, and bring them in on the process.

We need to grapple, together as a university, with hard questions about teaching, and clarify our values as a community.

We didn’t ask hard questions until we were in conversations with people who were resisting the new model.

So, by then, the questions weren’t informing the work, they just seemed defensive.

IF YOU HAVE OTHER QUESTIONS YOU THINK NEED TO BE ASKED, PLEASE SHARE THEM WITH EACH OTHER IN THE CHAT
I have all of these strategies for how I would do things differently to improve the process, outcome, and campus buy-in.

I honestly don’t know if they would make a difference in the pushback we got.

This is a big change. We felt it was aligned with our core values, so we kept going even though not everyone was happy.

It will feel to some like you are changing the rules on them. Some will feel attacked. And truth be told, some simply will not want to do it.

Most of these concerns can be, if not prevented, then mitigated or addressed.

But, you should be prepared for push back

- Hopefully you won’t make the same mistakes we did, and you can create a productive path to input and feedback early on.
- But, the truth is: You aren’t going to reach everyone.
- The goal is to change the culture, not the mind of every individual.

Still, we’ve been making good progress…..
What we learned

The explicit and action-oriented support of Provost’s Office and the Academic Senate, as well as other campus partners, have been critical to the Initiative’s Progress.

That progress would not have occurred without

The explicit and action-oriented support of Provost’s Office and the Academic Senate, as well as other campus partners has been critical to the Initiative’s Progress, and in addressing the concerns raised in the previous slide. The senate has done a number of things to support the initiative since its launch:

- Held senate meetings where concerns were aired
- Charged its joint Senate/Provost Committee with gathering data on progress on teaching plan development in the schools (big impact)

The Provost’s office

- Wrote and spoke publicly about his support for the initiative, and changed policy around how teaching could be evaluated
- Brought in a person dedicated to oversight of the teaching initiative
- Reorganized and invested in the Center for Excellence in Teaching so it could better support schools and faculty through the
- initiative (2 new positions)

Campus Partners have
- Collaborated on faculty trainings
- Provided technical support or content expertise on teaching as it relates race, inclusion, accessibility, wellness
- Academic deans created new positions “Vice Deans of Teaching” to support the teaching initiative in their schools
Teaching Evaluation

What we used to do

• Student evaluations
  • Item 11: Overall, how would you rate this course
  • Item 12: Overall, how would you rate this instructor
  • ...
  • ...
  • ...

To illustrate what a big change this was,
Let’s take a look at what we used to do to demonstrate our value of teaching at USC.
I love this slide, because it is such a stark reminder of how our behavior didn’t match our stated values
This is how we used to evaluate teaching at USC
That’s it.
And yet all of our materials talked about “the USC experience”
and how students would get a great education.
What is recommended for evaluating teaching?

University of Michigan
Center for Research on Learning and Teaching

A comprehensive, systematic approach to evaluating multiple components of the teaching process, including but not limited to:

- Instructional Observation
- Course materials review
- Assessment review

Let’s compare that to what is recommended for evaluating teaching in the education literature.

I’ll show you where we are now in our change process.
WHERE ARE WE KNOW:
I’ll walk you through the implementation process using our model as the framework

This is the model we're working toward now. Think of this model as the foundational layers or levels that support teaching at this university:

- The university level
- The school level
- The faculty level

There are three cornerstones that run through the model, and have to be addressed at each level:

- Development
- Evaluation
- Reward

And there is a central column feeding resources into each cornerstone and each level, if they are needed

- This is where our Center for Excellence in Teaching comes in

We started at the university level.
At the University-level:

- We developed a USC definition of Excellence in Teaching--which served as was our foundation.
  - You can see, the definition underlies all three cornerstones of the model, and informs the resources and policies created to drive the initiative,
  - It’s criteria determined our
    - Our teaching development programming
    - Our peer review evaluation tools and training, as well as our new Student Learning Experience Tool
    - And our revised reward structure
The USC Definition of Excellence in Teaching informed:

- The evaluation tools we developed
  - Peer Review Measures
  - Student Learning Experience Evaluation

The definition and the evaluation tools helped us model:

- Evaluation Processes

The definition and evaluation tools and processes led to:

- Faculty Development Resources

The definition, evaluation, and development resources led to:

- Models of Incentive Structures

The definition framed everything we did.

It informed how we structured the peer review tools and students learning experience evaluation.

The combination of the definition and evaluation tools led to a formulation of possible evaluation processes.

The definition and evaluation tools and processes told us what we need to do to support faculty in reaching the criteria in the definition.

And all of those elements informed reward structures:

Rewarding teaching not just on performance, but on investment in teaching development, on effort toward reviewing peers’ teaching, and on teaching leadership.

The intent was to make this difficult change as manageable as possible.

So we created resources that schools could just adopt or edit in a way that worked for their discipline, as they created their school based plans, rather than having to go become experts in teaching and learning just to write their plan.

Though schools were free to ignore these and create or find their own.

The only guidance was:

Their Definition needed to be broadly aligned with the university’s and the criteria had to be evidence-based.
The evaluation tools, development opportunities, and incentive structures should be directly tied to the criteria in their definition.
Revised our SETs → Learning Experience Evaluations

Five Subscales
- Course Design
- Instructional Practices
- Inclusive Practices
- Assessment Practices
- Course Impact

Student Engagement Items
- Hours Per Week Doing Coursework
- Number of Times Contacted Instructor Outside of Class
- Type of Study Strategies Used

Qualitative Feedback
- Most and Least Valuable Aspects of the Course and How to Improve Low Rated Items

Guidance to Students on Appropriate Types of Feedback

The first thing we tackled after the definition was revising our questionnaire for student evaluations of teaching
- And, The first thing we did there was change the name from Student Course Evaluations to Learning Experience Evaluations
  - This was meant to change the way the campus thought about student input
  - To reframe our expectations of students
    - Moving away from treating them as pedagogical experts qualified to evaluate teaching
    - And asking them instead to tell us about their learning experience; something they are uniquely qualified to do
- Next we created subscales to help faculty categorize and make sense of the feedback they receive from students
  - READ SUBSCALES
  - Within those subscales we only selected or created items students were qualified to answer
  - I can provide our items later, if you are interested
● We then added items asking students to evaluate THEIR OWN effort in the class
  ○ This was intended to help students understand that their learning is a shared responsibility
  ○ Their experience depends on their effort, the class’ effort, as well as their instructors’ effort
  ○ They are not passive receptacles that professors pour knowledge into
    ■ They have to actively seek it, struggle with it, take ownership over their learning process
● We also revised the items that asked for qualitative feedback
  ○ We removed omnibus questions like “overall how would you rate your professor or this class”
    ■ These items ask for a subjective sense that is not tied to an objective criteria
    ■ So they are the most subject to bias
  ○ We included items that were tied to the criteria we already asked students about:
    ■ “If you rated one of the above items with a low score, what is one thing that could improve that aspect of the course?”
  ○ We asked about specific aspects of the course that were most and least valuable to their learning process
● Finally we provided guidance on what is and is not appropriate, to help students frame their feedback more professionally
● We did not expect these changes would make the challenges to student evaluations disappear
  ○ But we tried to minimize the problematic aspects of student evaluations, while maximizing the value of the feedback they could provide faculty
USC Student Evaluations no longer a Primary Measure of Teaching Effectiveness at USC

Not correlated with student learning or other measures of teaching effectiveness (Braga, Paccagnella, & Pellizzari, 2014; Clayson, 2008; Deslauriers, McCarty, Miller, Callaghan, & Kestin, 2019; Erasey & Valdes, 2020; Hornstein & Law, 2017; Stark & Freishtat, 2014; Uttl, White, & Gonzales, 2016)

Women are rated lower than men (Basow & Silberg, 1987; Fandt & Stevens, 1991; Martin, 2016; Mengel, Sauermann & Zöllitz, 2018; Mitchell & Martin, 2018; Rivera and Tilcsik, 2019; Rosen, 2017; Sidanius & Crane, 1988; Wagner, Rieger, & Voorvelt, 2016)

- Even when courses were taught online by male & female instructors who each taught a course under a male & female identity (MacNeil, Driscoll & Hunt, 2015), and when students were randomly assigned to a male or female instructor (Boring, 2017)

The same effect for faculty of color (Anderson & Smith, 2005; Bavishi, Madera, & Hebl, 2010; Reid, 2010; Smith & Hawkins, 2011).

Arbitration Decision in Ontario, Canada states that “Student evaluations cannot be used to measure “Teaching Effectiveness” for tenure and promotion decisions” at Ryerson University (Farr, 2018; OCUFA, 2018; Freishtat, 2016; Stark, 2016).

While we were doing this work, it just so happened that more and more research on the problems with students evaluations was being highlighted.

USC had a Diversity Equity and Inclusion Initiative happening at the same time.

The provost, seeing all of this research, called a meeting and said, “We can't claim to value DEI, and still put a large proportion of our faculty at risk by using biased and invalid measures of teaching effectiveness.” So the call was made that Peer Review would be the primary measure of teaching effectiveness and student evaluations could be one of many measures used to evaluate student engagement.
Acknowledging what we are measuring

Student evaluations are not valid measures of teaching effectiveness

Student evaluations are often actually satisfaction surveys

Students are not experts qualified to evaluate pedagogy or instruction

Students are qualified to evaluate their learning experience

Student perceptions of learning experiences should inform our teaching, but should not determine our effectiveness

So in making the change to our LEE’s and how they were used, we were acknowledging what we were actually measuring.

READ SLIDE
After the revision of the Learning Experience Evaluation
We moved on to Developing peer review tools guided by our definition
There were four tools we created, and we created both on ground and online versions

- Self reflection and goal setting
- Syllabus Review
- Grading and Feedback Review
- Classroom Observation

All of these forms are downloadable and editable. http://cet.usc.edu/resources/instructor-course-evaluation/

Schools could choose to adopt these as their measures
They could edit them
Or they could create their own or adopt another form
The only guidance was their tools had to be directly tied to their own definition of excellence in teaching, and they had to be evidence based
We also created resources to help schools think about types of evidence that could be used for various categories of the teaching portfolio. Walk through a couple of examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Possible Methods</th>
<th>Possible Measures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teaching Effectiveness</strong></td>
<td>Peer Review: (Majority of category review)</td>
<td>Classroom Observation, Syllabus Review, Assessment Review, Teaching Reflection Statement, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(50+% of teaching evaluation)</td>
<td>Other methods:</td>
<td>Outcome measures, awards, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other categories might include...</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teaching Development</strong></td>
<td>Evidence of Investment</td>
<td>Teaching workshops, training programs, conferences, leadership in teaching development, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Review of Peers' Teaching</strong></td>
<td>Peer Review</td>
<td>Quality of review reports, number of peers reviewed, leadership in peer review, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inclusive Teaching Practices</strong></td>
<td>Peer Review</td>
<td>Inclusive Syllabus Review, Inclusive Practices Observation, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Engagement</strong></td>
<td>Peer Review</td>
<td>Classroom Observation, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>*Student Feedback</td>
<td>Learning Experience Evaluation, etc.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
After we had a good sense of what our criteria were for excellence in teaching And how we would measure that We went on to create faculty development institutes designed to help faculty achieve those criteria And be able to demonstrate that achievement in their instruction or course design And we tailored the institutes to meet the needs of faculty at four points in their careers:
Finally, we worked with schools to reimagine their incentive structures. We encouraged them to use a “teaching portfolio model” where all teaching related activities counted for teaching effort, and didn’t get dumped into service. And where faculty would be rewarded for all of these activities in their merit, promotion, and tenure reviews. Notice that 50% of the teaching portfolio should be teaching effectiveness. And, the primary method for evaluating teaching effectiveness is peer review. But, some combination of teaching development, reviewing peers, inclusive practices, teaching leadership should also be rewarded. Student engagement should also be assessed. LEEs can be used as one measure, but other measures should be used to offset any risk of bias.
Counting as Teaching vs. Service Activities

- These activities demonstrate **commitment** and **impact** on **teaching excellence**
- If change is desired, **incentives** should be maximized to motivate the change

At ‘SC, the intent for counting those activities as teaching was to demonstrate that
- Investing in your teaching
- Ensuring excellence in your department by reviewing peers’ work
- Leading teaching initiatives

Were all highly valued activities that should be meaningfully rewarded

Putting those activities in service would have sent the message that we are simply adding on rather than reprioritizing efforts
WHERE ARE WE KNOW:
Let’s come back to implementation of the model

Once the university structures were in place,

we focused on the school level tasks

● We asked each school to create its own discipline-specific plan, using a faculty-led shared governance process
● and using the same teaching model:
  ■ Create a Discipline-specific Definition to guide your plan
  ■ Create development opportunities to help faculty reach the criteria in the school’s definition
  ■ Create a rigorous peer review process that evaluates the criteria in the school’s definition
  ■ Revise the incentive structure to reflect these new opportunities and activities, and meaningfully reward them
  ○ Schools could use the centralized resources or adapt them to their discipline’s pedagogical practices to save time and
work,

Or develop their own,

- The only guidance was that it be:
  - Generally aligned with the university’s definition (for instance, leaving inclusive practices out, wouldn’t be okay)
  - And grounded in evidence-based practices

- We asked the schools to create their own plans to
  - ensure it was customized to their discipline,
  - and there was faculty ownership and buy in,
  - as well as faculty control over the process

- The university plan provided the framework, but
- The school plans would be where all the action happened

- As of today
  - Almost every school (20 out of 21 academic units) has submitted a teaching plan
  - Many innovative and comprehensive approaches to the model (as well as some plans that met minimum standards)
  - Peer review has begun (but is not fully implemented) in a majority of schools
  - Merit, promotion, and tenure teaching criteria have changed in most schools
  - Teaching development opportunities have been implemented
WHERE ARE WE KNOW:

Finally, for the initiative to take hold, a lot is required of faculty

--and this is where a values clarification process is needed at the university

As much as faculty care about their students, and want to do their best for them,

● They have limited time
● They have to allocate that time strategically and wisely
● If faculty don’t see real and tangible changes made by the university in the way it invests in, evaluates, and rewards teaching…
● The change will die on the vine

Through our initiative, we have asked our faculty to

● Engage in creating their school’s teaching plan and vision, which many have done
● Reflect on their own teaching and think about areas they’d like to
- strengthen
- Find time in their already packed schedules for developing and evaluating teaching
  - This means reprioritizing their efforts (this won’t happen if reprioritization isn’t visible in university resources and incentive structures)
- We’ve asked them to invest in development and training activities
- To be trained on peer review tools, and review their colleagues’ teaching in the same way they do for scholarship
- We’ve asked them to allow their teaching to be reviewed by their peers
- And we’ve asked many to become teaching leaders in their schools and departments to support their school’s teaching initiatives

That is a lot to ask of faculty.
- So how are we doing on the faculty level?
The Pandemic has been horrendous
And, the shift to remote teaching as catapulted USC’s teaching initiative forward at least ten years.

Faculty have:
- Reflected on teaching using a **different lens**
- **Reprioritized** and **reorganized** their content
- **Sought Training**
  - \(~1000\) engaged in 6-week online teaching institutes
    (w/fundamental teaching and learning principles)
  - \(~15\)X what we normally see in a year
  - \(~3700\) attended 160 workshops
  - \(~25\)X what we normally see in a year
- Developed **communities of practice**, sharing ideas and best practices

- **Reluctant faculty** have come for tech help, got their questions answered, came back for more
- **Senior faculty** are seeking training
- Many faculty have shared that they believe they are **teaching better now than ever**
  - Many say the work required to get organized for online instruction has paid off
  - Most say they plan to keep using many of the tools in the future, in their on-ground courses
- All across our campus, faculty are thinking about, talking about, and putting untold numbers of hours into their teaching

Well, on the investing in teaching development side, we were making some great strides, faculty were coming to institutes, engaging with the center. Our numbers were up...
But then, a catastrophe created an exponential shift
Read slide
Peer Review is hard, but doable….and worth it.

Any work > No work

Seriously though, peer review really does take significant effort.

So does peer review of scholarship.

What are our values? Where do students rank in our priorities?

Peer review is hard, but we’re starting to hear some positive feedback

- Teaching evaluation is more useful
- Meaningful feedback that can improve my teaching
- Learned more about teaching from reviewing my peers than all previous evaluations

On the peer review side, we’re still in the early stages.
Let’s talk a bit about peer review.
The truth is, ANY effort beyond the NO EFFORT required to look at student evaluation means is going to mean more work. And that is what USC was used to.
READ SLIDE
Teaching plans have just recently been submitted and approved to the shift to peer review is just now happening, and in some cases has been delayed because of the COVID work overload

- But, many faculty in schools that have implemented it say the evaluation process is far more useful to them
- They get useful feedback that they can use to improve their teaching, rather than just average ratings
- They report learning a lot from reviewing their peers
Reward Structures are Shifting

- Teacher leaders having impact
- Recognition through new "Continuing Appointment" (Tenure for Teaching)
- Broader categories of teaching are showing up in MP&T criteria
- Faculty submitting richer, more varied evidence of teaching excellence

And we are beginning to see faculty rewarded for their teaching efforts
- Teaching leaders are being brought into dean’s senior leadership teams and leading schools’ teaching efforts
- A new “continuing appointment” option has been created that provides the university’s best teachers with what amounts to tenure or security of employment.
  - Our first candidate is being reviewed by a university committee right now
- Activities like teaching development and reviewing one’s peers is showing up in merit, promotion, and tenure criteria
- As a result, faculty are beginning to submit richer and more varied evidence of teaching excellence