QUALITY OF TEACHING COMMITTEE
REPORT TO EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT FOR ACADEMIC AFFAIRS AND PROVOST
December 2024

BACKGROUND

The Quality of Teaching Committee was established by the Provost in May 2024 with the goal of defining quality teaching at USC. The Committee was asked to review institutional priorities, analyze existing policies and guidelines, review best practices, and consult stakeholders to develop core principles for quality teaching. Based on the core principles, the committee was tasked with developing measurable criteria and indicators of quality teaching; identifying the essential elements of a required teaching workshop/module for new instructors; and making recommendations to university-wide policies, guidelines, or initiatives to better support quality teaching. The findings and recommendations will be documented and shared to advance teaching excellence and support student success.

The Committee engaged 17 faculty and academic administrators and 5 students, including representatives from the Faculty Senate Steering Committee, Faculty Senate's Instructional Development (InDev) Committee, graduate and undergraduate student bodies, and Student Government.

THE COMMITTEE'S WORK

August 2024: Committee members gathered input from stakeholders, including students (undergraduate and graduate), faculty, instructors, and academic administrators. It was very important for the Committee to build on meaningful work of other committees, such as the InDev Committee, and seek best practices and frameworks from other institutions and professional associations.

September 2024: The Committee engaged in a working session to review input received and information gathered from other committees (including the standard student course experience survey questions developed by the InDev Committee), institutions, and professional associations to develop core principles of quality teaching.

Early October 2024: The Committee engaged in a working session to develop indicators of each of the seven core principles identified in the previous session.

Late October: Committee members reviewed university-wide policies, guidelines, and initiatives related to teaching excellence. They also gathered departmental or college guidelines or initiatives that may have applicability across disciplines as well as policies and guidelines from other institutions.

Early November: The Committee conducted another working session to review university policies, faculty manual guidelines, Center for Teaching Excellence initiatives (presentation provided by CTE Director Matt Thatcher), applicable departmental or college/school guidelines or initiatives, and policies and guidelines from other institutions. The Committee then used their insights from the review, in combination with the identified core principles and indicators of quality teaching to lift out the most important points of emphasis.

Late November: The points of emphasis were refined during the Committee's last working session to serve as the essential elements of a required teaching workshop/module for new instructors. A brief overview of key works defining best practices in high-quality teaching in higher education was also compiled and shared with the Committee. During this concluding session, the Committee also received an update on the work of the InDev Committee (presentation provided by InDev Chair Stephanie Armstrong), addressed practical considerations for the implementation of a required teaching workshop/module for new instructors, and discussed overall recommendations related to quality teaching.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee identified the following seven core principles of quality teaching to serve as an overarching guide.

Core Principles of Quality Teaching at USC

- High student expectations that are clearly communicated
- Supportive, student-focused learning environment
- Course-appropriate engagement and active learning
- Timely, constructive feedback for students
- Well organized and designed courses
- Continuous improvement
- Deep content knowledge

The Committee determined a set of indicators reflective of each guiding principle, outlined in the following chart.

Core Principles of Quality Teaching	Indicators of Quality
High student expectations that are clearly communicated	Course learning objectives promote higher order thinking skills (see Bloom's Taxonomy) and are clearly communicated to students
	Course syllabus includes Honor Code
	Students receive examples of excellent work by previous students
	Students are provided with clear rubrics for evaluation of their work
Supportive, student-focused learning environment	Measured by student course experience survey question: *The instructor created a safe and inclusive learning environment for students*
	Instructor is available for and encourages out-of-class conversations with students
	Instructor communicates both positive and constructive feedback
	Instructor offers multiple means of engagement
Course-appropriate engagement and active learning	Syllabus reflects multiple opportunities for students to engage (cognitively, affectively, agentically, etc.) with the material
	Syllabus includes evidence of various activity types and modes of learning
	Course requires students to engage in guided reflection
	Course facilitates student-student and student-faculty interaction
Timely, constructive feedback for students	Measured by student course experience survey question: *The instructor was responsive to my questions and concerns*
	Course includes low-stakes opportunities for students to receive formative feedback
	Students have opportunities to respond to and clarify feedback
	Instructor provides timely, constructive comments on student work
	Syllabus states when students will receive feedback
Well organized and designed courses	Syllabus highlights important dates and shows evidence of a logical flow of topics and assignments, with content organized into modules and anchored in previously learned concepts
	Instructor designs course by first identifying learning objectives, then assessment methods, then activities
	Syllabus is available to students on or before the first day of class
	Assignments are easy for students to find and submit
	Course content and materials are accessible to all types of learners
	Course Blackboard (or other LMS) site is well organized and easy for students to navigate

Continuous improvement	Instructor engages in self-reflection and peer observation
	Instructor demonstrates ongoing, self-motivated pursuit of pedagogical knowledge and skills
	Instructor implements improvements based on teaching evaluations, peer observations, student outcomes and other forms of feedback
	Instructor invites and applies mid-semester feedback from students to make real-time adjustments
	Instructor attends workshops and seminars from the Center for Teaching Excellence and/or external professional societies and uses their resources
	Instructor demonstrates continuous improvement of course content, assignments, and overall quality
	Instructor implements relevant industry/field best practices into course design
	Instructor documents teaching improvements over time
	Instructor demonstrates coordination across multi-section courses
Deep content knowledge	Instructor participates in professional development opportunities related to teaching and their field, engaging in lifelong learning
	Instructor connects course content to real-world scenarios and trends
	Instructor demonstrates an awareness of the state of higher education

The following essential elements of a required teaching workshop/module for new instructors were selected by the Committee – in alignment with the USC core principles of quality teaching, indicators of quality teaching, and other research conducted by the Committee.

Essential Elements of a Required Teaching Workshop/Module for New Instructors

Cultivate a growth-mindset learning environment

- Foster a safe, inclusive educational setting
- Provide opportunities for active learning and discussion
- Develop learning activities that support mastery (i.e. backward design or asynchronous activities)
- Design flexible assignments and deadlines
- Incorporate a variety of assessments throughout the course, especially by week six
- Include low-stakes opportunities for students to receive formative feedback

Develop effective course design and content relevance

- Create a syllabus that enables students to understand expectations and plan for the course
- Describe course materials clearly and transparently
- Incorporate content, examples, and technologies that are relevant to and resonate with students
- Demonstrate awareness of students' world
- Implement research-based, high-impact practices

Commit to continuous improvement in teaching

- Engage in ongoing professional development
- Gather early, formative feedback from students to guide immediate adjustments
- Review course outcomes and feedback to refine approach for future offerings
- Participate in a formative peer observation process

Practical Considerations for the Implementation of a Required Workshop/Module for New Instructors

The committee recognizes that there are important practical considerations for implementing a required teaching workshop/module for new instructors. The Committee developed suggestions focused on four primary considerations.

Scalability: To make the workshop/module scalable across the university for all new instructors, embed instructional designers in colleges, schools, and/or disciplines and create small, face-to-face groups to build a Community of Practice.

Usefulness: To make the workshop/module practical and useful, provide exemplars of syllabi, rubrics, and learning activities, and as part of the course, instructors could create their syllabus or set-up the course they're teaching in Blackboard.

Engagement: To make the workshop/module appealing to instructors, include directly applicable resources for active learning, require a reasonable time commitment, and include opportunities to interact with others teaching in their disciplines.

Commitment: To make the workshop/module a real requirement, consider linking it to performance reviews, potentially mandating it as a condition of employment (likely requiring an earlier contract start date), and ensuring it is recognized by academic leadership as a valued professional development initiative.

Other Overall Recommendations to Enhance Quality Teaching

Syllabus generator that balances standardization and flexibility: Given that an effective syllabus is foundational for quality teaching, the Committee suggests developing an automated (perhaps AI-driven) syllabus generator with flexibility for the course details followed by all the standard syllabus requirements at the college/school and university level. This combination of standardization and flexibility would better support both students and faculty and could be automatically updated for revisions to policies, guidelines and resources.

Additional evaluation tools: The Committee emphasizes the need to use additional tools for developing and evaluating teaching quality, rather than relying solely on student course experience surveys for each course section. Peer observation was highlighted by both the committee and InDev as a valuable tool for instructors' learning and development, and a scalable model exists within the Center for Science Education.

Outstanding CTE resources: The many teaching resources available from the Center for Teaching Excellence are valuable and should be strongly encouraged for new and current faculty.

Repeat review in five years: Given that quality teaching will evolve over time, the Committee recommends a similar review take place in five years to ensure relevance and a future orientation.

Additional: Two additional items surfaced for future consideration.

- Provide more consistency among sections of the same course, as learning and final grades may differ significantly if there is wide variation in activities and assessments
- Review the student: faculty ratios by discipline to ensure they are appropriate and are supportive of quality teaching and learning

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

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