Department of English
Statement on the Evaluation of Teaching
Revised February, 2020

As a department, we seek to build a culture of deep investment in pedagogy. We believe that the evaluation of teaching is a collective project that requires multiple perspectives, experiences, and sets of documents. First and foremost, teaching evaluation should be grounded in the expertise of professional peers who know our disciplines and our department. These professionals and their judgments must account holistically for a colleague's pedagogy. This includes the review of items such as syllabi, assignments, graded work, feedback for students, structure and sequencing, and innovations within and beyond the classroom. We rely on peer faculty voices and on dialogue among the larger body of the department in order to understand any given colleague's pedagogy, and we aim to create inclusive practices of evaluation that address the different concerns of anyone teaching in our department.

We offer workshops on best practices, class visits, and mentoring for those who wish to improve in the classroom. We have a broad infrastructure of teacher training and support within the department, which we will keep available to all teaching faculty. This infrastructure is outlined fully in the departmental Teaching Guide, which is distributed to all instructors annually and remains available on the departmental website at all times; and it is backed up by the mentoring networks our department has developed within and across programs, including (but not limited to) CEAT, the NTS Mentoring Committee, curriculum and pedagogy committees, and various tenure and promotion subcommittees.

We honor and abide by the Faculty Conduct section of the Academic Integrity code, and we take seriously any evidence of a colleague's divergence from it.

We believe that the evaluation of teaching has a vital role in the broader evaluation of colleagues for promotion, renewal, and tenure. We seek to foster a determination among colleagues, reached in a fair, transparent, and robustly documented process, in accordance with departmental by-laws, that can provide the information necessary for faculty actions such as votes on contracts and hiring.

When we hire and review, we look seriously at teaching portfolios. The documents in any given teaching portfolio will vary based on the position and courses in question. The most common items that we look for when we review portfolios include: well-crafted syllabi, engaging assignments, innovation in pedagogy, a thoughtful state of teaching philosophy, positive and inclusive class climates, meeting goals in the syllabus in demonstrable ways, helping to expand the curriculum and develop new courses, a sharp attention to matters of diversity and equity, evidence of reliable and helpful feedback to students, evaluations from students and from peers,

mentoring of students beyond the classroom, sequencing and scaffolding of assignments, and an attention to methods such as digital composition and pedagogies. No single portfolio will exhibit all of these, but they represent elements that we commonly value.

Finally, we aim to address and contextualize concerns, expressed across all ranks and statuses, about the principles, norms, and methods by which our classroom instruction is evaluated. Historically, the Dietrich School placed a large emphasis on OMETs, especially in the dossiers of non-tenure stream faculty and graduate students. We believe that OMETs are one metric, but only one metric, by which teaching is evaluated. The primary function of OMETs in the evaluation of teaching is to bring areas of teaching effectiveness or concern to the attention of the colleague, director(s), and chair. Numerical and qualitative feedback from students will not be used in salary, renewal, and promotion decisions without additional context, including self-descriptions and characterizations from the teacher in question.

We trust that our students are sharp, insightful sources of feedback on both instructors and courses, but we also know that implicit and explicit biases skew student evaluations, most often (but not exclusively) along the lines of the protected classes at our university. We also affirm that a central component of a humanistic education arises when students consider alternative viewpoints, including those that might make them feel uncomfortable, or that might lead them to grapple with difficult questions fraught with disagreement. Our instructors should feel enabled to grade student work accurately and fairly, too, without fear that negative responses to lower grades will weigh down their OMETs. We therefore take student feedback seriously, but not as the sole arbiter of one's classroom excellence—positively or negatively—and we contextualize OMETs in light of the larger set of materials, in-class practices, self-characterization by the instructor, and educational aims that constitute any given course.

We understand the nature of any given course, too, as weighing on the colleague's performance in the course and on the character of student evaluations. Courses that are primarily for non-majors, courses that are required, new courses (and new faculty teaching them), courses taught at unpopular times or in poorly equipped classrooms, and courses that are solely for upper-level majors all have different contextual elements that must be considered fairly in any evaluation. We encourage faculty to develop new curriculum, challenge students, and test out experimental teaching methods without fear of adverse consequences should they fail. Rather, they will be judged for their educational tenets and pedagogical practices.