

# “Evaluating Teaching: A New Approach to an Old Problem”

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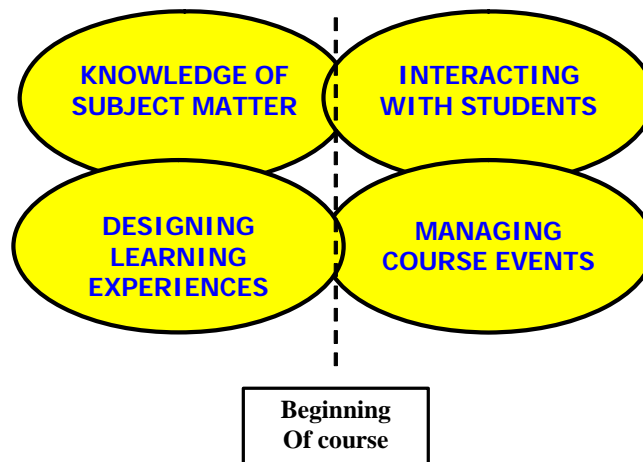
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## Getting Started

We should begin the task of finding a good way to evaluate teaching, by asking:

- What are the fundamental tasks involved in all teaching?
- What is it that we want all teachers to do well?

### Four Fundamental Tasks of Teaching



- The premise of the diagram above is that everything that teachers do (good and bad, traditional and innovative) are specific examples of one or another of these four types of activities.
- In my experience, the two factors that are most responsible for variation in the quality of teaching are professors' ability (a) to **design learning experiences** and (b) to **interact with students**.
- The vast majority of college teachers have enough **knowledge** of the subject matter to teach well and do an adequate job of **managing** course events.

## What Do We Want All Professors to Do – as Professional Educators?

Starting with the Fundamental Tasks”:

- I. We want professors to perform the **Fundamental Tasks** well, especially the two that account for most of the variance in the quality of student learning.
- II. But we also want their teaching to lead to **High Quality Student Learning**.

- Are their learning activities and assessment activities focused on important kinds of learning, or low-level kinds of learning?
  - Are the important kinds of learning achieved well by only a few students, or by a large percentage of the students?
- III. We also want all professors to work at **Getting Better Over Time**.
- Do they work at learning new ideas about teaching, e.g., reading books on teaching and learning, going to workshops?
  - Do they use what they learn? Or do they continue doing “same old, same old”?

**Creating the Primary Criteria for Good Teaching**

Using our definition of what we want all professors to strive to do well, we can create the following four primary criteria:

- I. The **design** of the learning experience
- II. The quality of **teacher-student interactions**
- III. The **learning** achieved by students (during and by the end of the course)
- IV. The teacher’s **efforts to improve** over time

**Sources of Information for Each Criterion**

For each criterion of good teaching, we need an appropriate source of information: Different criteria, different sources of information. Here are appropriate sources of information for these criteria:

<b><u>Criteria:</u></b>	<b><u>Primary Source of Information:</u></b>
I. The Design of courses	• Course design materials
II. Teacher-student interaction	• Student questionnaires, Peer observations
III. Quality of student learning	• Samples of student learning materials
IV. Getting better over time	• Teacher self-report, Documentation

**Interpreting and Assessing One’s Teaching**

My suggestion would be to have to each professor be the first one to interpret and assess the information on the various aspects of their teaching. Then a departmental committee could review the teacher’s self-assessment, to determine whether they agree with it or want to modify it.

With a little experience in examining information on each of these criteria, the department would be able to establish Standards of Performance, i.e., what constitutes High, Medium, and Low levels of performance.

Also, they would probably want to establish sub-criteria for each of the four main criteria. Here are some possible sub-criteria:

## 1. Course design

- Situational factors: Course decisions should be based on solid information about multiple situational factors, e.g., the number of students, their prior knowledge, their feelings about this subject, etc.
- Learning goals: Are focused on higher level learning, more than just content coverage.
- Learning activities: Are active and not primarily passive.
- Feedback and assessment: These procedures enhance the learning process (i.e., they constitute educative assessment) and are more than just a basis for assigning grades.
- Level of integration: The learning goals, teaching/learning activities, and the feedback and assessment procedures reflect and support each other.

## 2. Interaction with students (individually & collectively): Students perceive the teacher as...

- Competent
- Trustworthy
- Stimulating
- Making students feel included and valued, regardless of age, ethnicity, class, nationality, etc.
- Dynamic (or energetic)
- Challenging

## 3. Overall quality of the student learning experience: A high percentage of students...

- Are engaged in their learning *during* the course.
- Have achieved significant kinds of learning by the *end* of the course.

## 4. Improvement over time

- Seeks out new ideas on teaching.
- Innovates and tries new ideas in one's own teaching.
- Reflects continuously on "What do I need to learn about and do next, to improve my teaching?"

### Effect of Evaluating Teaching This Way

If a college or university evaluated their teaching professors this way, it would provide several benefits. It would...

1. Provide professors with the tools and motivation to self-assess and improve their own teaching.
2. Give academic units and the institution in-depth knowledge of who is really excelling in their teaching, based on information that goes well beyond questionnaires that basically ask: "Did students like them?"
3. Strengthen the whole institution, by achieving the two benefits listed above. These procedures would allow the institution to **measure the kind of teaching it values**, rather than falling into the trap of **valuing what it can easily measure**, i.e., "popular teaching."