Teaching Statements for Tenure and Promotion Cases: Suggestions for Faculty, Chairs, and Directors

The LSA Executive Committee looks closely at the teaching record of each candidate for tenure and/or promotion. Members examine and comment upon the individual E&E evaluations, the E&E comparisons made by the department, the syllabi, and the TRP or JTP report. Executive Committee members often use the candidate's teaching statement to frame their discussion of the teaching aspect of a tenure and promotion case, so the statement serves an important function and requires care and attention. The guidelines below are broad, not definitive. They are meant to help departmental chairs and program directors in the mentoring discussions that take place prior to the preparation of the promotion materials.

College guidelines set a maximum of five pages for the teaching statement. Most teaching statements are in the range of four to five pages. In general, the Executive Committee has found that statements of one or two pages are simply not of sufficient length. The statement needs to feature more than simply a prose recounting of a list of courses taught. A typically good statement would include most of the following elements:

- A statement of teaching philosophy.
- A statement outlining strategic goals.
- A statement discussing classroom techniques and tactics, paying attention to both undergraduate and graduate teaching.
- A discussion of graduate and undergraduate mentoring, research lab supervision, UROP/SROP and REU students, and completed Ph.D. students
- A serious engagement with the trajectory of the E&E evaluations, and honest self-reflection on classes that have produced lower scores. Faculty should avoid the formulaic and the facile.
- A statement discussing the candidate's contributions to the curriculum, in relation to both the department or program and the College itself.
- A sense of future ideas or plans for course development, curricular contribution, or pedagogical experimentation or innovation.

<u>Teaching Philosophy</u>: Teaching philosophy makes up a challenging part of any teaching statement, since it is easy to slip into familiar and vague platitudes about "the relationship between teaching and research" or "the power of critical thinking." Excellent teaching statements that have come to the LSA EC in recent years have tended to concretize and personalize such abstractions. Faculty members, for example, have written about seeing themselves as part of an identifiable chain of teachers, each with obligations to the future. They have written about the importance of

their role in producing educated citizens who understand the power of their particular discipline. They have written about education and its role in a commitment to social justice. These—and similar kinds of positions, with some elaboration—tend to start a teaching statement out well, giving readers a chance to understand the candidate as someone who has thought seriously, not only about research, but also about teaching. While some part of a statement may come from a third-year-review document, candidates will likely want to reflect on how their teaching has changed and not simply copy verbatim words written earlier.

<u>Strategic Goals</u>: Strong teaching statements tend to move from philosophy and motivation down to the level of strategy—that is, a plan of action directed at a limited set of major pedagogical goals: "I have three goals that shape every classroom I enter." "My courses navigate the balance between content and skills; between what I think students need to *know* and what they need to be able to *do.*" "The central aspiration of my pedagogy is to teach critical thinking; by that I mean…" And so on.

<u>Techniques and Tactics</u>: Most teaching statements contain examples of classroom techniques that are particularly important to the faculty member. Some statements emphasize the use of new technology pedagogy. Others point to excellent execution of more traditional classroom practices. Still others frame particular issues surrounding large course teaching, cross-discipline teaching, survey courses, graduate seminars or others. Most faculty members have developed some signature activities for their classrooms; these are important evidence of commitment to excellent pedagogy.

<u>Graduate and Undergraduate Supervision and Mentoring</u>: In many disciplines laboratory or research supervision and other forms of graduate and undergraduate mentoring are central to the teaching mission of the College. Most statements list these forms of teaching, and faculty members may wish to discuss the goals and strategies they bring to this teaching and to highlight their successes: significant numbers of mentees or graduate students, commitment to diversity recruitment mentoring, highly active or particularly well-structured lab teaching situations.

<u>Challenges and Opportunities</u>: A very small number of faculty members get consistently high marks on student evaluations. Most faculty, however, have particular courses or semesters in which evaluations are less strong. Excellent teaching statements *do not ignore* negative E&E evaluations, but tend to reflect upon them, pointing out overall trajectories and evidence (one hopes) of improvement: "I struggled in this course at first, but after consultation with CRLT and various mentors, I made [these changes], which made the class stronger [in these ways]." One of the most common anxieties surrounding teaching is that faculty members are evaluated solely on teaching evaluations; in fact, the LSA EC makes a holistic review and views evaluations *only* in the context of the entire case. It is thus to a candidate's advantage to engage

E&E evaluations in a thorough and self-reflective manner. Demonstrating sustained effort to engage classroom challenges should make up an important part of that reflection. Simply pointing to lower scores and promising to do better is *not* a good strategy.

We encourage faculty members to aim for high response rates, which often simply means setting aside 15 minutes of class time (as we once did with paper forms) and asking students to pull out their laptops and complete the evaluations. Faculty can also use the CTools feature that allows them to track response rates and to encourage students to participate in evaluations. Chairs and Directors should counsel faculty members to avoid statements that sound as if they are blaming students for poor evaluations ("the students lack the necessary skills to do well in this class" or "the class is too diverse in composition, ability, and level of interest for me to succeed across the full range of students.")

<u>Curricular Contributions</u>: Most teaching statements will include some discussion of how the faculty member contributes to the departmental curriculum and, in many cases, to the broader curriculum of the College, not simply through distribution courses, ULWR, R&E or other requirements, but also through commitment to a liberal arts education.

<u>Future Ideas and Plans</u>: Most of the teaching record will point evaluators to the past, and to the trajectories that allow readers to make a judgment in the present moment. A candidate can help set the tone for that reading by carrying those trajectories into the future, with a short statement outlining ambitions for the future. Weak statements tend to situate candidates as helpless or narrowly self-focused ("I'll teach the survey class if I'm asked, but am hoping to develop a small seminar on my new research interests"). Stronger statements demonstrate an engagement with the broader enterprise of teaching and curriculum.

The teaching statement is usually viewed before any other material in the teaching file, and it sets the tone for the reading and analysis that follows. A strong, engaged, honest teaching statement tends to predispose readers in a positive direction; a weak or disengaged statement tends to predispose readers toward a more critical reading.

The Tenure Review Panel/Joint Tenure Panel:

Evaluation of Teaching in Tenure and Promotion Cases

The LSA Executive Committee looks closely at department or program evaluations of the teaching record of each candidate for tenure and/or promotion. Members of the Executive Committee examine and discuss the faculty member's individual E&E evaluations, the E&E comparisons made by the department, the syllabi, and the TRP or JTP report. Indeed, Executive Committee members often comment on the thoroughness of the TRP/JTP evaluation itself. The report thus offers a window into the teaching culture of a department or program, even as it provides a central frame for the subsequent evaluation of the candidate. The guidelines below are broad, not definitive. They are meant to help departmental chairs and program directors in charging TRP/JTP committees with their tasks and in assessing their performance.

Most TRP/JTP committee evaluations of teaching are in the range of two to three pages. Two or three paragraphs are insufficient; more pages might be necessary in particularly difficult cases. The evaluation needs to include more than simply a recounting of courses taught or a restating of sentences pulled from the candidate's teaching statement. A typically good evaluation would include most of the following elements:

- Comments on the Teaching Statement
- Comments on the syllabi and/or other classroom materials
- Classroom observation and evaluation, including an assessment of the adequacy and utility of departmental observations in the particular case.
- Comments on graduate teaching and mentoring, research, and the success of graduate students
- Comments on undergraduate mentoring or research
- A thorough engagement with the E&E evaluations, with honest consideration of problems and a fair contextualization of challenges
- Summaries of the general tenor and direction of student comments on E&E evaluation forms
- Comments on the candidate's contributions to the curriculum, in relation to both the department or program and the College itself.

Teaching Statement: Most reports would ordinarily include an evaluation of the teaching statement, a document that should reflect an appropriate level of engagement with the teaching mission of the College. Does the committee see in the statement a commitment to pedagogical growth, curricular contribution, and classroom innovation, as well as an honest self-reflection on successes and challenges?

Syllabi and Materials: Do the syllabi provide enough information for students—and evaluators—to get a clear sense of the class's goals and strategies? If the syllabi are "bare bones," is there a CTools or other online site that provides more detail for students? Are the courses organized, rigorous, and appropriately paced? Are evaluation strategies clear and fair? If other teaching materials are included in the case, are these well-designed?

Classroom observation and evaluation: The LSA Executive Committee appreciates seeing evidence of peer-level classroom observation, which can often be usefully triangulated with E&E reports and comments, and with the candidate's teaching statement. Such observations should be more than purely descriptive, and should evaluate the candidate's organization, presentation skills, pedagogical techniques, ability to react to questions, student rapport, as well as other classroom skills. Excellent and comprehensive information on peer assessment of teaching can be found at http://www.crlt.umich.edu/resources/evaluation-teaching.

The Executive Committee does not advise or endorse the practice of "just-in-time" evaluations—typically a member of the TRP or JTP engaging in a hasty visit to the candidate's classroom as the report is being prepared in the fall semester of the tenure year. Rather, the committee prefers to see evidence of classroom observation that begins early in a career and is ongoing and continuous. Such evaluation, however, is *not* required as part of a case. Indeed, some units include no classroom observation in their report.

Many units have regular and ongoing annual classroom observations, and these fall into two categories, producing tremendous opportunities for confusion and unevenness across the College. One class of observations is **formative** or developmental; that is, ongoing "mentoring" observations that take place regularly over the course of a faculty member's early career. In such cases, units typically keep a record of the *fact of the observation*, but *not the content*, which remains private. In such a case, the TRP/JTP report should point to the candidate's participation in such a program of formative pedagogical mentorship, perhaps indexing it to changes across time in other forms of evaluation.

A second class of observations is **summative** or evaluative; that is, observations conducted for the purposes of formal assessment and record. Some units do summative evaluations *annually* in connection with merit evaluations, and they maintain a clear record that can become part of a tenure and/or promotion case. Other units do not incorporate annual summative reviews into the case. Most units have procedures and timelines for summative review at the time of the *third-year review.* In some cases, summative observations preparatory to the third-year review are seen as part of an overall teaching record, and they are incorporated into the tenure and promotion file. In other cases, teaching observations during the third-year review remain part of the third-year review file, and are not incorporated. Many units engage in summative observation *in the preparation* of a tenure and/or promotion case. In this case, best practice will be to schedule such observations in the fall and/or winter semesters of the year prior to the tenure case being submitted. Because a TRP or JTP may not have been constituted at the time of a summative peer observation, it may be the case that these evaluations are conducted by faculty colleagues and not under the formal auspices of the committee. A thorough evaluation, and a clear communication of the report to the Chair and to the TRP/JTP will ensure serious consideration by the committee.

Whatever form of observation characterizes a department or program, it is critical that the TRP/JTP engages *the fact of any formative observation* and the *substance of any summative observation*, which should be included as part of the report. Committees should comment on the overall teaching mentoring the candidate has received in the pre-tenure years, which may include both formative/developmental and summative/evaluative review, departmental mentoring programs, team-teaching that is aimed at mentoring, and other opportunities provided for the candidate's growth as a teacher.

<u>Comments on graduate teaching, research groups, and post-docs</u>: Most TRP/JTP reports will include a section detailing the candidate's work with graduate students and (in some disciplines) post-doctoral researchers. The candidate will have provided a list of students, so the committee might comment further on students completed or mentored, the placements of completed students, co-authorship, unusually large (or small) numbers of graduate students, pedagogical work with research groups, and the department or disciplinary contexts for graduate work.

<u>Comments on undergraduate mentoring or research</u>: Most reports will also consider "non-didactic" work with undergraduates. Has the candidate advised a significant number of senior theses? Integrated undergraduates into a lab or research group? Worked with UROP/SROP/REU students? Conducted an unusual number of independent studies? Co-published with undergraduates?

<u>A thorough engagement with the E&E evaluations:</u> Tenure and promotion candidates consistently report that their greatest anxieties—in terms of the teaching portion of their cases—rest with the E&E evaluations. They worry that a single poor showing reflects negatively on their teaching and that the evaluations convert subtle and difficult teaching issues into crude and unreliable numerical rankings that are nonetheless read as

decisive. The LSA EC completes instead a holistic review in which local context and detailed evaluations of E&E evaluations are critical. In this context, the evaluations require substantial attention from the TRP/JTP committee. The Executive Committee should *not* feel that it has put more time and energy into examining E&E evaluations and other materials than has the TRP/JTP or the unit. The College's *Historical Teaching Record Tool* allows departments to pull longitudinal and comparative records for faculty with minimal effort. Those reports generally give committees a full record of the results for questions 1-4 on the E&E evaluations. Most TRP/JTP reports will use that data to evaluate the following issues:

- **Change over Time**: Ideally, a candidate will have one or two classes taught in multiple iterations (or classes of similar configuration), and the committee can compare early efforts with later ones. Often, one sees improvement. But not always. Sometimes the numbers fluctuate; sometimes they hold steady, and on occasion they show a downward trend. The committee should consider these trajectories and look for explanatory factors—and that means walking a fine line between contextualizing and excusing or justifying. Strong TRP/JTP reports sometimes track over time "class categories" such as graduate seminars, undergraduate seminars, surveys, core courses, etc.
- **Comparison Pool**: The *Historical Teaching Record Tool* also generates a pool of comparative data that allows a TRP/JTP to compare the candidate with faculty peers in the same or similar classes [note: the tool does not solve the old problem of unique courses in small departments having limited comparisons; we encourage you to use time-honored strategies in finding reasonable comparisons]. Many unit reports establish an average for the peer comparison pool and then use that to situate the candidate's teaching within the department.
- **Questions 1/2 and 3/4**: Question 1 asks students to evaluate the course itself; Question 2 asks them to evaluate the effectiveness of the instructor. These two questions are commonly taken together as the broadest possible snapshot of teaching evaluation data. Question 3 asks students how much they have learned; Question 4 asks about how much they did or did not want to take the class. Low Q4 scores can mean that the instructor has a poor reputation among students… but just as often it means that the course is difficult, a prerequisite, a distribution or other requirement, or carries a negative folklore. Low Q4 scores combined with higher Q3 scores can suggest that students recognized their own learning—whether or not they "enjoyed" the class.
- **Secondary Questions**: Currently, the College encourages new faculty members to develop a suite of secondary questions from the available list and to keep them (more or less) consistent across their teaching careers. A strong TRP/JTP report will typically identify one or more secondary questions that suggest issues or opportunities for the faculty member. Often the most

informative questions are those concerning workload, organization, clarity of material, presentation skills, and fairness of grading. Secondary questions can also show strengths in the teaching case, and can reveal aspects that have not been addressed in other forms in the materials.

- **Quartiles**: The individual E&E evaluation forms show the average scores for a given class and place them in relation to College and University averages, marking first, second, third, and fourth quartiles. It is worth noting where a candidate comes down on these measures. If he or she is always in the top quartile, that says something. And it *may* (and probably does) say something if the faculty member is always in the bottom quartile. But it is also worth noting that these are averages, with margins of error, and they are probably not best used as absolute measures of anything. Faculty members teaching a difficult survey course, for example, may almost always occupy the bottom quartile. The contexts, comparisons, and local knowledge of a TRP/JTP committee can be vitally important in understanding the nuances of particular record, while also paying attention to the fine line existing between contextualizing and excusing.
- **Response rates**: Low response rates compromise the effectiveness of the evaluations, and the committee should be attentive to unevenness in these rates. Note, for example, that Winter 2009 was the first semester to use the online evaluation system, which crashed, producing generally unusable evaluation returns. We now encourage faculty members to set aside fifteen minutes of class (as we once did with paper forms) and ask students to pull out their laptops and complete evaluations. It is true that the online evaluations pose challenges, but many faculty members have found ways to generate excellent response rates.

Thorough evaluation of the E&E forms can be one of the most taxing—but also one of the most interesting—activities of a TRP/JTP committee evaluation of the teaching record. It should include an honest consideration of problems and a fair contextualization of challenges.

<u>Summaries of the general direction of student comments</u>: Student comments generally do not accompany the full tenure and/or promotion dossier, so the Executive Committee relies upon the TRP/JTP report for an overall sense of student comments. The report should not simply cherry-pick laudatory comments, but should derive, if possible, from the aggregate comments any consistent patterns of complaint, praise, ambiguity, or characterization of teaching performance. These might be used to support—or to qualify or complicate—patterns emerging from the quantitative section of the E&E evaluations.

Comments on the candidate's contributions to the curriculum: Is the candidate consistently teaching core classes? Lower division surveys? Small graduate courses and senior seminars only? The Executive Committee has seen a range of cases: individual faculty members who have developed and taught significant numbers of new courses for their unit; faculty members who have taught numerous large courses; faculty members who take on core methods teaching… and, on the other hand, faculty who have managed to teach only small courses in their specialties to small numbers of students. A strong TRP/JTP report will note such situations and discuss them frankly and honestly. Likewise, contributions outside departmental curriculum should be noted and discussed.

The Executive Committee of the College reads TRP/JTP reports for their thoroughness and engagement, as well as for the frame and context vital to understanding a particular case. Strong committee reports suggest an engaged and active teaching culture in the department or program. Weak or disengaged reports suggest the opposite. As chairs and directors charge TRP/JTP committees, a key part of the committees' mandate should be the serious consideration of the candidate's teaching record.

Review Panel, Unit Assessment, Chair's Assessment:

Three Registers of Assessment in Tenure and/or Promotion Cases

The guidelines for tenure cases ask departments and programs to provide three registers or forms of assessment in tenure and/or promotion cases:

- A Tenure Review Panel or Joint Tenure Panel report
- A Unit Assessment of Teaching and Research
- The Chair's Cover Letter

The guidelines below are meant to clarify for departmental chairs, program directors and their staffs the nature of assessment in cases.

<u>TRP/JTP Report</u>: The committee is charged with making the most detailed assessment of the case and its report forms the basis for the consideration of the decision-making body in a unit. The report is critical, as well, to the candidate response, an important feature in the College's layered review tenure process. The report must represent every possible negative element in the case, in order to allow the candidate to respond to the full range of critique. Chairs need to coach candidates to regard such presentations as opportunities rather than attacks. They are one of the great virtues of the layered review process. Petulant or overly defensive responses do not show the candidate to his or her best advantage.

<u>Unit Assessment</u>: In many (if not most) cases, the unit discussion will produce no new insights into the case, and in these instances, departments and programs simply insert into a case a page saying "Unit Assessment: See TRP Report." In other cases, however, the discussion of the decision-making body diverges from the TRP/JTP report or produces new insights not found in the report. In such cases, the Unit Assessment can make up an important part of the case, and the Chair or Director should detail the discussion of the unit and/or its decision-making body. Substantive negative assessments that emerge out of these discussions require an opportunity for the candidate to respond. In such situations, units should consult with their relevant Associate Dean for specific procedural advice.

<u>Chair's/Director's Letter</u>: As departmental administrator, a chair or director has unique insights into the case that may not be part of either the TRP/JTP evaluation or that of the unit and its decision-making body. The Chair/Director cover letter, then, represents a third register of evaluation, and the possibility for either agreement with previous decisions or a statement of dissent.

In most cases, there emerges a general consensus across all three of these registers. In these instances, statements to that effect can replace the repetition of similar prose in multiple reports (or in the case of the Unit Assessment, an explicit gesture to the TRP/JTP report). In other instances, however, these three registers represent important complications and contexts for a tenure and/or promotion case, and they should be separated out with clarity and detail.