

POLICY ON EVALUATION OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

PREAMBLE

Fundamental to the achievement of its Mission, the Sydney College of Divinity values excellence of scholarship, which underpins all of its educational programs. The achievement and maintenance of quality teaching and learning is an integral component of this philosophy. The commitment to maintaining high academic standards must be sustained by quality teaching and learning.

To ensure the provision of a quality educational experience for the students, teaching staff must be committed, well-prepared, expert in their Discipline, and willing to review, reflect upon and improve the programs and course units they teach.

This Policy on the Evaluation of Teaching and Learning provides a framework for undertaking the evaluation of both teaching and course units. It applies to Sydney College of Divinity accredited teaching staff and students enrolled in the Sydney College of Divinity awards. The process of evaluation is intended to perform a range of functions, including:

- enhancing understanding about teaching and learning through collecting information from a range of sources, in a systematic way;
- providing teaching staff with information about their teaching performance that will inform their own planning and professional development;
- enabling the College to demonstrate effective quality assurance processes in relation to teaching and learning;
- maintaining a uniformly high standard of teaching and learning across Member Institutions of the College.

The pedagogy underlying these functions is that the evaluation of teaching and learning is a developmental and formative process to be used in the development of teaching practices and improvement of teaching and learning environments.

CONTEXTUAL FRAMEWORK

The diversity of Member Institutions which comprise the Sydney College of Divinity federation defines a particular context within which teaching and learning occurs. These Member Institutions vary in size, structure and philosophy/tradition, and

are geographically dispersed. These characteristics have been recognised and acknowledged in the design and development of this Policy, in order that all Member Institutions can conform with the policy without disadvantage or compromise.

Accordingly, the following features are pivotal to the achievement of quality teaching and learning:

- a commitment to the pursuit of academic excellence
- the acceptance of a single policy which applies equally to all Member Institutions
- respect for different theological and denominational traditions
- acknowledgment that teaching and learning is a shared act between teacher and student
- agreement that the process of evaluation is a necessary formative and mutually beneficial process
- recognition that evaluation is a value-driven, ethical process that must respect the rights of individuals involved
- acknowledgement that different learning environments with different student/teacher interactions will apply
- awareness that the level of resourcing will have differential impacts upon teaching and learning
- understanding that the characteristics and expectations of different Disciplines will influence the nature of teaching and learning
- respect for the different academic, cultural, linguistic and age experience that students will bring to the learning environment
- acceptance of different modes of delivery
- agreement that openness and transparency must apply at all times
- acceptance that due care should be taken to ensure that data derived from an evaluation process should be used in an appropriate manner and that actions taken protect the anonymity of individuals.

EVALUATION OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

Evaluation data comes from a number of sources, including Student Learning Outcomes, Student Feedback and Evaluation, Teacher Self Reflection and Analysis and Peer Review of Teaching. Whilst the remainder of this Policy elaborates the Student Feedback and Evaluation Source, strong encouragement is given for teaching staff to also utilise data from other sources.

STUDENT FEEDBACK AND EVALUATION

Student Evaluation of Teaching and Learning is to be carried out by the use of two separate evaluation instruments. The Student Feedback on Teaching Survey (SFTS) instrument will provide feedback on teaching, whilst the Student Feedback Unit Survey (SFUS) will provide feedback on course units taught.

STUDENT FEEDBACK ON TEACHING SURVEY (SFTS)

1. The primary objective of this survey is to provide feedback to individual teaching staff on their perceptions of the effectiveness of teaching, and to target areas for development and improvement. The survey process complements the Student Feedback Unit Survey (SFUS).
2. The SFTS will comprise 14 core items covering content, approaches, attitudes and effectiveness, supplemented by two open-ended questions. A Member Institution may add a small number of questions to provide for specific feedback to matters additional to the SCD core of questions. The SFTS is to apply to all modes of teaching, including Distance Education. However, in the case of Distance Education, it will be conducted as a trial in the first year of the operation of the policy. This will enable an evaluation of the appropriateness of the instrument and its various items for Distance Education, and for modifications to be made for future use.
3. The SFTS will be administered at least once for each course unit taught within a two year cycle. There will be a fixed two year cycle eg 2007-2008, for the purpose of implementing the evaluations.
It may be undertaken more frequently as appropriate e.g. for staff who are seeking promotion or to evaluate the effectiveness of a newly-introduced teaching approach.
4. The SFTS will be administered within Member Institutions and undertaken by all Sydney College of Divinity accredited teaching staff.
5. The Sydney College of Divinity will process all completed SFTS forms and provide the individual results to only the staff member and his/her Member Institution Supervisor. The response rate should be taken into account when analysing the data and interpreting the results, with care being taken to avoid reaching conclusions based on small returns.
6. The results of individual evaluations will remain confidential and will be retained for not more than three years. Over that period, the Sydney College of Divinity and the Learning and Teaching Committee will be able to monitor student feedback on teaching longitudinally, which will target priority areas for teaching enhancement and professional development. For this purpose, all evaluations will remain anonymous.

STUDENT FEEDBACK ON UNITS SURVEY (SFUS)

1. The primary purpose of this survey is to gather feedback on the individual units of study in which students are enrolled each semester.
2. The SFUS comprises 13 core items that deal with course unit quality including content and relevance, assessment, learning environment, learning experience and outcomes, and workload. A Member Institution may add a small number of questions to provide for specific feedback on matters apart from the SCD core of questions.

3. The SFUS will be administered at least once for each course unit taught in a two year cycle. There will be a fixed two year cycle eg 2007-2008, for the purpose of implementing the SFUS evaluation. Each Member Institution will designate an official person to administer the survey, not the individual course unit teacher. Member Institutions can administer this instrument, or a modified version, more frequently within the two year cycle, if that is the wish of the Member Institution. The Sydney College of Divinity will process all completed SFUS forms and compile the relevant summaries and feedback to teachers in charge of the course units, Course Co-ordinators and to Discipline Leaders.
4. The information obtained from the SFUS will contribute to ongoing improvement of course units and courses, and aggregated SFUS information will contribute to enhanced quality of teaching and learning across Member Institutions. It will be particularly helpful for Course Co-ordinators and Discipline leaders in monitoring and moderating standards, performance and outcomes.
5. The results of individual evaluations will remain confidential and will be retained for not more than three years. Over that period, the SCD and the Learning and Teaching Committee will be able to monitor student feedback on units to ensure that they remain relevant, effective and lead to productive outcomes.

TEACHER SELF REFLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Teaching staff are also encouraged to think beyond student ratings in terms of their own professional development, and supplement the survey findings by developing and refining their own teaching philosophy, maintaining a Teaching Journal, utilising processes of self reflection and analysis, and being responsive to the student feedback.

Peer review of teaching is a further means by which analysis and improvements can occur. This involves classroom performance via observation (face-to-face or video), and teacher-student interaction analysis (both in-class and on-line).

PROCEDURES

The Learning and Teaching Committee, a sub-committee of Academic Board, will assume responsibility for the processing of Student Evaluations. This will involve developing strategies to develop a positive culture across Member Institutions about the value and use of evaluations, preparing annual schedules for evaluations, compiling and aggregating results from surveys, and preparing reports and recommendations. The work of the Committee will be facilitated by the Sydney College of Divinity administration.

The Committee will prepare guidelines to assist teaching staff with the implementation of Student Evaluations across all modes of teaching. It will emphasise that teaching and learning is a partnership, and as such, each participant has particular roles and responsibilities.