



UNIVERSITY OF THE  
WITWATERSRAND,  
JOHANNESBURG

## POLICY DOCUMENT

# Policy on the Evaluation of Teaching and Courses

## WITS POLICY

Version No. 1.1

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<b>Policy Title</b>	Policy on the Evaluation of Teaching and Courses
<b>Policy Officer</b>	DVC: Academic
<b>Date Approved</b>	
<b>Date Effective From</b>	
<b>Last updated</b>	31 May 2018

## 1. CONTEXT / BACKGROUND

This Policy provides principles and a structure that should guide practice on evaluations in line with good practice in the field. It offers an overview of the purposes of course and teaching evaluations, sets out the edifice for conducting these evaluations, along with the obligations of staff and students in these processes. Evaluation processes should provide opportunities for academics to learn from practice in a way that contributes to their development as university teachers of their disciplines.

Evaluations of teaching and courses should balance providing information to support quality enhancement (development) and demonstrating the quality of teaching across programmes (accountability). The Policy acknowledges that teaching and learning happens in contexts that are complex and that it is crucial to have a flexible system. It addresses the 'teaching effectiveness' of all taught, credit-bearing courses (undergraduate and postgraduate) delivered by the University, including the taught portion of research courses. Teaching effectiveness in this context is defined as teaching that contributes to successful student learning in line with the Wits graduate attributes.

This Policy foregrounds an approach to evaluation that draws on data generated through multiple methods/tools such as rigorous self-reflections, peer reviews and student feedback. This comprehensive approach mitigates potential biases that could result from using one method of soliciting feedback on practice whilst ensuring that data used to evaluate teaching is in-depth and triangulated.

The details on practice and processes of evaluations are provided in a guidelines document drafted to support faculties when conducting evaluations.

## 2. DEFINITIONS

- 2.1 **Course evaluation:** An evaluation conducted to obtain feedback from students, peers, external examiners, and/or self on the learning and teaching practices adopted in the course in support of students' achievement of learning outcomes.
- 2.2 **Evaluation for accountability:** An evaluation conducted to appraise and validate the quality as well as effectiveness of teaching and courses.
- 2.3 **Evaluation cycle:** Refers to the three-year academic cycle as indicated in Human Resource (HR) documents.
- 2.4 **Evaluation for development:** An evaluation conducted to elicit feedback to improve and/or strengthen teaching practices.
- 2.5 **Formative evaluation:** An evaluation conducted for self-improvement (development). Academic staff elicit students' and/or peer feedback to identify areas that need attention to modify and enhance teaching practices.
- 2.6 **High-risk courses:** Courses identified according to institutional guidelines as in need of improvement based on low pass rates.
- 2.7 **Learning outcome:** Statement of intended learning to be achieved by students.
- 2.8 **Peer:** Others teaching in the same module, block or course. This also refers to peers in the school but not teaching in the same course.
- 2.9 **Peer review:** A structured collegial process where academic peers give and receive feedback on their course and teaching practices regarding their effectiveness in promoting student learning.

- 2.10 **Academic staff member:** An individual employed by the university on a full-time or part-time basis and/or any other nature of appointment, who has teaching responsibilities.
- 2.11 **Student success:** Refers to the development of competent and responsible graduates with attributes aligned to the Wits graduate attributes.
- 2.12 **Summative evaluation:** An evaluation conducted for accountability purposes to support professional development processes, career progression and quality assurance of courses.
- 2.13 **Teaching evaluation** (also known as lecturer evaluation): An evaluation conducted to elicit feedback from students, peers, external examiners or self on how the teaching process facilitates learning in support of students' achievement of the learning outcomes.
- 2.14 **Teaching portfolio:** A selective, reflective, and scholarly document aimed at communicating a staff member's growth and competence as a 'teacher in higher education' with a clear focus on efforts to support student learning.
- 2.15 **Teaching practice:** Refers to all teaching activities, including the way they are organised for supporting student learning.
- 2.16 **Teaching:** Refers to appropriate processes and well-designed strategies in whatever mode chosen (face-to-face or online) that aim at facilitating student learning. These may vary according to different teaching contexts, such as undergraduate and post-graduate courses, as well as across disciplines.

### 3. PURPOSE

Teaching and course evaluations are central to the university's commitment to enhancing student engagement and success. They offer a means to foster a scholarly approach to teaching while supporting academic professional development through reflective practice and demonstrations of accountability on the quality of teaching-related offerings.

There are two main purposes for conducting the evaluation of teaching and courses:

- 3.1 ***Developmental* – conducted to support plans and strategies for promoting student learning through:**
1. providing evidence to support reflective practice that encourages scholarly practices in teaching and the development of courses;
  2. eliciting feedback on significant teaching and course changes and/or innovations to enhance teaching and curricula;
  3. providing feedback to support professional development of individual staff members;
  4. providing staff with information to support learning across programmes and the wider University; and
  5. identify courses in need of intervention or improvement.
- 3.2 ***Accountability* – evaluations conducted to:**
1. support quality assurance and career progression by providing evidence of the quality of teaching and courses that align with policy processes for probation, promotion, and teaching awards
  2. demonstrate professional growth and development of teaching competence over a period; and
  3. provide the institution with a rich source of information on student experiences of courses, as well as across programmes and schools.

The Evaluation of Teaching and Courses Policy provides principles and guidelines on the evaluation of teaching and courses to:

1. enhance teaching and support transformation of the curricula,
2. identify good teaching practices,
3. support the professional development of academic staff,
4. support the career progression of academic staff,
5. validate quality of teaching and curricula practices, and

6. address challenges where these are identified.

#### 4. SCOPE

This Policy is applicable to all academic staff (full-time, part-time, joint appointment, sessional, teaching assistants and tutors) engaged in any form of teaching and/or course responsibilities, such as course coordination, lectures, tutorials, practical, experiential, and service learning in both under- and postgraduate courses. It is applicable to all taught undergraduate and postgraduate courses offered by the University, including the taught portion of research courses.

#### 5. PRINCIPLES

Evaluation should:

1. *Be supportive*: the evaluation of teaching and courses should be conducted in a manner that creates a supportive and nurturing environment;
2. *Acknowledge and recognise diversity*: the evaluation of teaching and courses should acknowledge as well as respect student diversity, staff's teaching styles, different disciplinary contexts and disciplinary knowledge;
3. *Be anonymous*: student feedback is anonymous so that students can provide feedback freely and honestly to ensure the integrity of the results;
4. *Be triangulated*: evaluation results draw on multiple and credible sources of data on teaching and courses;
5. *Be substantive*: evaluations consider both essential and technical aspects of teaching and courses, such as planning, implementation and the achievement of outcomes;
6. *Contribute to student success*: evaluations contribute to the enhancement of teaching and curricula with the view to support student success;
7. *Be interpreted within a specific context*: evaluation results are interpreted within a meaningful context, such as a staff member's teaching experience, nature of discipline, type of course (including whether the course is core/elective/service), teaching context (lecture/laboratory/online/workplace learning etc.) and class size;
8. *Close the feedback loop*: evaluation feedback and follow-up action is shared with students; and
9. *Avoid incentives*: no form of incentive shall be used to increase response rates.

#### 6. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

##### 6.1. Students are required to:

1. Participate in the evaluations of teaching and courses with the intention to provide constructive feedback in a manner that upholds the values of respect and dignity to all members of the institution.
2. Where there are challenges experienced in the learning and/or teaching process which have not been addressed, students are required to follow guidelines and/or processes to report them as recommended by school/faculty.

##### 6.2. Academic staff is required to:

1. Plan for the evaluations of their teaching and courses as per need within the three-year evaluation cycle.
2. Educate students about the importance of giving constructive feedback on teaching and courses.
3. Encourage student participation by ensuring that students' feedback is used to enhance teaching and curricula and communicated as such to students.

4. Communicate with all relevant stakeholders on issues emerging from evaluations and use feedback to improve teaching and curricula.

**6.3. Course Coordinators are required to:**

1. Request/initiate the process for course evaluations at least once in an evaluation cycle.
2. Facilitate sharing or discussions of the evaluation results with all stakeholders.
3. In cases where challenges are reported by students, ~~course coordinators should~~, in consultation with the staff member(s) concerned, make decisions on how to investigate and address the challenges.

**6.4. Educational developers/academic developers are required to:**

1. Support staff members to analyse evaluation results.
2. Provide guidance on drawing up plans for appropriate actions to address teaching and curricula challenges.
3. Advise on the choice and usage of alternative and/or appropriate evaluation tools.

**6.5. Heads of School are required to:**

1. Request or initiate teaching and/or course evaluation(s) in cases where challenges have been raised. This process should involve the staff member(s) concerned.
2. Request or initiate an evaluation of courses in which students are doing exceptionally well, with the aim to highlight and share good practice in appropriate platforms. Plan and take appropriate action in line with evaluation reports.
3. Support and recognise the training and work of peer reviewers.

**6.6. Centre for Learning, Teaching and Development (CLTD) is required to:**

1. Provide information, training and support to students, staff members and other stakeholders on how to plan for an evaluation cycle, conduct evaluations and use the evaluation results.
2. Assist staff members to interpret evaluation results to facilitate action for professional development.
3. Store evaluation data (reports) in a secure place over a five-year period (this only applies to teaching evaluation reports) and ensure this data can only be shared with individual staff concerned (unless requested by a Head of School/Dean).
4. Recommend other forms of evaluation to facilitate an in-depth understanding of teaching or course challenges where necessary.
5. Provide quarterly and annual reports on the conduct of evaluations in schools/faculties/institution.
6. Track and report on issues emerging from evaluations that are both faculty- specific and University-wide that influence and/or impact on teaching and course delivery on a yearly basis.
7. Assist with the training of peer reviewers.

**7. PROCESS**

**7.1. Evaluation of Teaching**

Teaching evaluations should be conducted for all staff members with teaching responsibilities at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

Over a three-year evaluation cycle, staff members are required to evaluate their teaching using a variety of evaluation tools with at least *one* evaluation eliciting student feedback and at least *one peer review*.

1. An individual staff member is expected to initiate the process to have her/his teaching evaluated;

2. Multiple ways should be used to obtain feedback on the effectiveness of teaching process (self, students and peers);
3. The evaluation data can be collected in different ways (paper-based or digital);
4. Results of the evaluation process should be used by academic staff in developing teaching practice and may also be used in building evidence of teaching effectiveness for promotion applications or annual reviews;
5. Line managers such as the Heads of School (HoS) or a *departmental head* should choose to discuss the evaluation results with the academic staff member being evaluated as part of the teaching and learning quality assurance mechanism, for personal development or as part of performance management;
6. The Centre for Teaching, Learning & Development (CLTD) evaluation services will, in consultation with faculties, develop a set of core questions that will be used across the institution for teaching evaluations. Schools can add school- specific questions in areas not covered;
7. Selected evaluation tools and opportunities should be sensitive to the teaching context and mode, e.g. problem-based learning, flipped classroom, blended learning and/or any other innovative teaching approaches.

#### **7.1.1. Reports and access to teaching evaluation data**

1. Evaluation reports are confidential and will only be sent to the individual staff member whose teaching is evaluated, or any other party to which the staff member explicitly consents.
2. On request, a teaching evaluation report will be provided to a Head of School (HoS) or Dean when the evaluation is conducted for accountability purposes (e.g. general quality assurance processes, probation and/or promotion).
3. In a case where an evaluation's sole purpose is developmental, a staff member can keep the report confidential. However, he or she could include such a report in the teaching portfolio as part of personal reflection.
4. Educational development practitioners in Faculties and CLTD will have access to evaluation report(s) to provide support and professional development to address challenges identified.

#### **7.1.2. Frequency and timing of the evaluation**

1. When conducting a teaching evaluation, consideration should be given to survey fatigue on the part of students. This should be balanced with the aim of conducting evaluations of all teaching instances.
2. Where possible, evaluations should be conducted in good time and not too late in the semester to miss the opportunity for change, to support student learning.

#### **7.1.3. Evaluation of Teaching as part of Post Graduate coursework and supervision**

1. Teaching when part of Post Graduate course work should take place preferably early in the supervision process to allow for feedback to better support students.
2. In the case of the supervision of PhD theses, evaluations should be conducted both formatively ( in the early years of the supervision process) and summative ( towards the end of the process).

#### **7.2. Course Evaluation**

All taught, credit-bearing courses (undergraduate and postgraduate) that are offered by the University of the Witwatersrand and have students enrolled in them, should undergo some type of course evaluation at least once every three years.

1. Course evaluations should elicit students' and peer feedback on the quality of the course.
2. The evaluation of new courses should consider both teaching and the conceptualisation of the course.

3. The evaluation of new courses should be conducted in the first year of implementation to improve the course and thereafter for both improvement and accountability purposes.
4. The course coordinator should oversee the course evaluation processes and ensure that staff members teaching the course are involved.
5. Course coordinators should ensure that all components of the course other than lectures, such as laboratory experiments, work-based learning/service learning/experiential learning and tutorials, are evaluated as part of the overall evaluation.
6. A Dean/HoS may request an appropriate course evaluation to be conducted with the full knowledge of the staff member(s) when there are concerns about the course. In such cases, both the requester and staff member(s) concerned should have access to evaluation reports.
7. Selected evaluation tools and opportunities should be sensitive to the teaching context and organisation of the course, e.g. problem-based learning, flipped classroom, blended learning, clinical practice and/or any other teaching approaches being used.
8. Course evaluations should support the process for transformation of the curriculum in a way that recognises context, indigenous knowledge and the vision and strategic intent of the institution, amongst other things.
9. All courses identified according to the Wits system as 'high risk' should be evaluated using a variety of appropriate qualitative tools to get an in-depth understanding of the challenges. Evaluation should also highlight aspects of these courses that are working well so that they are reviewed and optimised.
10. CLTD evaluation services will, in consultation with the faculties, develop and review a set of questions that will be used across the institution for course evaluations. Faculties/Schools could add discipline-specific questions in areas not covered.

#### **7.2.1. Reports and access to course evaluation data**

1. Course evaluation report(s) will be made available to the staff member responsible for the course or to all staff members involved in the course in cases where several staff members are involved in teaching a course.
2. Any individual staff-related data collected during the course evaluation process is for use by the academic staff member responsible for the course, the direct line manager (Hos or HoD) and/or a nominee (such as a peer reviewer).

#### **7.3. Evaluation Mechanisms**

The purpose of the evaluation will determine the type of evaluation mechanism(s) selected and when the evaluation is conducted. Staff members are encouraged to use a variety of tools that are appropriate for their teaching context.

##### **7.3.1. Personal Reflection**

Self-reflection is an important part of the evaluation process. Staff members are required to use as evidence the feedback from students and peers, as well as ideas from the literature (research) on learning, teaching and assessment in their respective disciplines to think deeply about teaching practices. Questions that are critical to consider include: "*What am I doing in my teaching (both course and teaching) to support student success? How can I improve my teaching?*"

##### **7.3.2. Consulting Academic Peers**

###### **1. Peer Review**

- a. All staff members are expected to have at least one peer review in each three-year evaluation cycle.



- b. The focus of the review should inform the process to identify an appropriate reviewer. For instance, academic developers could be requested to conduct a review if the focus is on pedagogical competence but may not be appropriate reviewers if the review also needs to focus on discipline knowledge.
- c. Peer reviewers are required to undergo training to prepare them to undertake the peer review process and there should be a system to recognise their contribution.
- d. Peer review report(s) should be included in a staff member's teaching portfolio as part of reflection on and evidence of teaching competence.

## 2. Internal /External Moderators and Examiners

- a. Where applicable, reports from internal and/or external moderators and examiners should provide feedback on the course and should be used as another evaluation tool.
- b. Examiners' reports should be used to support or triangulate feedback from course evaluations, peer reviews and/or self-reflection.

### 7.3.3. Student Feedback

#### 1. Medium to Large Classes ( Undergraduate)

- a. Quantitative survey: The Wits evaluation survey should be used to obtain feedback from students on their teaching and/or course experience.
- b. All questions that are selected as core items for teaching evaluation should be included in evaluations conducted for the purposes of accountability.
- c. After consultation with CLTD, context-specific or customised questions can be included under the additional items and open-ended section of the survey.

#### 2. Small Classes (Undergraduate and Postgraduate)

- a. Qualitative survey – provides an opportunity for students to comment extensively on their teaching and/or course experience.
- b. In consultation with CLTD, staff members are encouraged to develop questions that are appropriate for their teaching contexts in line with the purpose of the evaluation.

#### 3. Post Graduate Supervision Evaluation

- a. Survey instruments (quantitative and qualitative) that elicit sustained reflective commentary from post graduate students anonymously, about their experiences of supervision.

Several of the other tools listed below are also possible choices for use with smaller classes and postgraduate students.

#### 4. Other tools that can be used for obtaining feedback on teaching and courses:

- a. Clickers
- b. One-minute papers
- c. Stop-Start-Continue surveys
- d. Critical Incident Questions (CIQs)
- e. Focus-group interviews
- f. Small Group Instructional Diagnosis (SGID)
- g. Letter to successors (students sharing experiences as if advising the next cohort to enroll for the course)
- h. Exit interviews
- i. Alumni surveys.

**NB:** More information on these evaluation tools is provided in the guidelines document.

#### **7.4. Products of the Evaluation Process**

##### **7.4.1. Use of Evaluation Reports**

1. Staff should use the evaluation reports to support reflection processes on their teaching and curricula to inform them how to improve their teaching through research, innovation and experimentation.
2. Under- and postgraduate teaching evaluation reports should be viewed together to present a complete picture of a staff member's teaching.
3. Staff members are encouraged to share their evaluation reports with relevant stakeholders (Course Coordinators, HoS and Faculty Teaching and Learning (T&L) Unit) to receive the necessary support for professional development and career progression.
4. A HoS should use evaluation report(s) to provide support to the staff member concerned to satisfactorily address any identified challenges and/or promote professional development and career progression.
5. Where challenges are identified from student feedback and/or peer reviews, a line manager may initiate a process to conduct further investigation. This process will be undertaken with the full knowledge of the staff member to encourage collaborative and collegial attempts at addressing identified challenges.

##### **7.4.2.. Teaching Portfolio**

1. All staff with teaching responsibilities are required to develop a teaching portfolio. Selected evaluation reports should be included in the portfolio as evidence of teaching effectiveness.
2. Staff should use the evaluation reports included in the teaching portfolio to demonstrate a clear focus on student learning through a scholarly approach to teaching.

##### **7.4.3. Feedback to Students – Closing the Loop**

1. Staff members are encouraged to share key themes emerging from the evaluation reports with students.
2. Staff could indicate what improvements/changes will be made (or not made) to their teaching and/or course(s) in response to the students' feedback.
3. Student feedback from formative evaluation processes could be discussed with students in class or any other processes designed for this purpose.

#### **7.5. Measures of Success of the Policy**

##### **7.5.1. What will be used to gauge the success of the Policy?**

1. The use of evaluation results to support staff development initiatives to improve the quality of teaching and/or engagement in Scholarship of Teaching and Learning activities.
2. Engagement in appropriate practices when conducting evaluations and using the reports.
3. Increased uptake of peer reviews as part of a process of evaluating teaching.
4. Level of HoS usage of course and teaching evaluations as part of their quality assurance processes relating to at-risk courses or towards QQRs.
5. Documented improvements of teaching and courses
6. Documented self-reflections of the CLTD evaluation team on how the evaluation services and processes can be improved.

**7.5.2. What needs to be tracked?**

1. Staff and student participation in evaluations, satisfaction ratings in evaluation of teaching and courses at both under- and postgraduate levels per school and/or faculty. Deans/HoS/Line Managers should track this.
2. Participation rates as well as emerging trends in both teaching and course evaluations conducted per school/faculty/institution quarterly – to be done by CLTD.
3. Challenges identified arising from teaching and course evaluations and actions taken at school/faculty/institutional level, leading to increased success – to be done by Deans/HoS/CLTD.
4. Demonstrations that concerns raised during evaluations in the past do not re-occur.

**7.5.3. Budgetary requirements**

The academic staff development budget will have to be adjusted to accommodate the necessary capacity development to support policy requirements.

**7.6. Associated Documentation**

1. Admissions Policy (S2008/2205a)
2. Learning and Teaching plan 2015-2019
3. Principles of Teaching and Learning (S20005/548a)
4. Promotions Policy
5. Senate standing orders on Teaching and Learning
6. Statement of Principles for Postgraduate Supervision (S2007/476B)
7. Student Access Principles (S2005/2049)

**7.7. Other pertinent matters****Data Protection and Freedom of information and adherence to the South African PoPI (Protection of Personal Information) Act**

1. Staff and student data gathered through the teaching and course evaluation processes should be collected, stored, and processed in line with the South African PoPI Act.
2. Staff data should only be made available to those staff members authorised to use it in line with existing Wits HR process guidelines.
3. Requests for use of the data for research processes should be processed in line with the Wits Ethical Clearance procedures.
4. All evaluation data collected remain the property of Wits University even when third-party systems are used to support the evaluation process.

**VERSION HISTORY**

<b>Version</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Summary</b>	<b>Changed by</b>
1.1	31 May 2018	This version of the Policy incorporated the Senate proposed changes of 30 May 2018 and thus replaces the S2018/658 (Senate) version of the Policy	Dr R Kizito (matters of substance) Mr V Nel (format and type setting)