

## CHAPTER 5

### THE CONTEXT FOR EVALUATION AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AT THE CAMPUS LEVEL

Christie Evans worked for Midwestern University, a large public research institution that had an international reputation for the quality of its programs. Midwestern was also the most comprehensive public university in the state and offered instruction to more than 27,000 undergraduate students and to more than 8,800 graduate and professional students in more than 100 disciplines (Midwestern University Accreditation Report, 1999). The university was well known for the quality of its basic and applied research. Once a professor accepted a position at Midwestern, s/he assumed the responsibility for a heavy load of scholarly work. Scholarship also played a large role in administrative decisions such as tenure, promotion and the rewarding of academic personnel at Midwestern.

Although the university's main goal was to provide "programs of the highest quality in instruction, research, and public service to meet the needs of the people of the state<sup>1</sup>," (Accreditation Report, p.13) Midwestern was said to be trying to increase the number of non-resident and diverse students. In 1999, Midwestern freshman class had students from 51 states and 33 foreign countries. Fifty three percent of these students were males and 47% females. Student distribution by race and ethnicity according to the university planning office (1999) included a majority of White non-Hispanic students, with small percentages of Hispanic, Asian, African-American, and International students.

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<sup>1</sup> Ninety one percent of Midwestern University students were residents from the state (Assistant Provost).

Faculty members at Midwestern were mostly White non-Hispanic males. Of the 2313 faculty members working for Midwestern, 72.6% were males and 27.4% females. Faculty distribution by race and ethnicity according to the university's planning office (1999) 80 % of the faculty members were White non-Hispanic, 2.8% were Hispanic, 8% Asian, 0.4% American Indian, 2.5 % African American, and 5.2% International.

In 1998 the university began to conduct a study on the status of women faculty. Results of the study indicated that women were underrepresented in the faculty ranks, and although some progress took place over time, the increase was small. The committee in charge of the study also found that Midwestern was ranked second to last in the number of women full professors, third from last in women associate professors, and ninth from last in assistant professors. Other findings indicated that although the salary gap between men and women for assistant professors was five percent, and the gap for full professors had not changed in the past eight years. (Chair of the Committee on the Status of Women Faculty, 1999)

The committee made several recommendations for improving the condition of women faculty members on campus. These recommendations included recruiting more women, monitoring the campus climate for women, increasing the representation of women and minorities at all levels, and ensuring salary equity of women on campus. (Committee on the Status of Women Faculty, 1999)

Following these recommendations, Midwestern began its efforts to increase the salaries for women and minority faculty "through the combination of new state funds and internal allocations" (accreditation report, 1999, p. 27). According to its accreditation report, Midwestern expects to provide higher salaries than those provided by their peer universities

during the financial years 2000 and 2001. The university is also committed to increasing the number of women and minorities in administrative positions. According to the 1999 accreditation report, one of Midwestern challenges is the need to continue recruiting, and retaining African American, Latino, Native American, Asian American and senior women faculty and administrators. For the distributions of salaries by gender and ethnicity in Midwestern University during 1999, see Appendix C.

### External Pressures for Accountability

Like other public institutions of higher education, Midwestern University had to follow certain procedures to ensure its status as a first-class university and to respond to external pressures for accountability. This involved both accreditation and State assessment requirements.

The Commission on Institutions of Higher Education at the North Central Association (NCA) required Midwestern University to follow certain guidelines for accreditation. As with other large research institutions, the accreditation agency allowed Midwestern to develop its own priorities for accreditation purposes. This gave Midwestern the opportunity to use its strategic plan as a base for self-improvement. In this way, the agency could look at the criteria that Midwestern has set for itself on its strategic plan. Still one of the areas in which the Regional Commission put some pressure, was the inclusion of student outcomes as criteria for self-assessment. As the Assistant Provost said:

Accrediting bodies have been trying to make institutional accreditation more meaningful for large research institutions where the ability to qualify for reaccreditation is not likely to be an issue. In that spirit, Midwestern

was asked to focus its recent accreditation visit on the issues most important to it. We decided to use our strategic plan, "A vision for the future." This plan was developed in 1995 using a participative process that involved ten working groups of faculty and administrators. The plan was organized around seven major principles, each of which encompassed a number of specific actions; these principles and actions became the focus of the self-study document and site visit. The development of a campus-wide student outcome assessment plan, newly added to the criteria for accreditation, was also part of Midwestern's preparation for its accreditation visit. Student outcome assessment was the only area in which the accreditation agency put some pressure for its inclusion in the accreditation plan and guidelines.

While the regional accreditation process had an emphasis on self-improvement, the state assessment requirements focused more exclusively on an outcome performance based approach. State pressures were on quantitative data and outcomes. As the head of institutional research and policy analysis at Midwestern said:

We are experiencing pressures for quantifiable information from the State. The state is looking for state-oriented measures for all public universities while allowing some flexibility for institutions. We are moving towards a performance approach at the state level. In this approach, we first determine our goals and point out what we are expecting to accomplish. Then, we have to write our expected outcomes within the budget proposal. The state is enforcing standardization, and it expects us to do a better job than the prior year. The focus is on quantitative standard outcomes, simple answers for complex questions.

Although both regional accreditation and State assessment processes stressed the importance for Midwestern to measure student outcomes, the accreditation agency had supported Midwestern's freedom to decide what outcomes, and to select the way in which the outcomes will be measured. The state, on the other hand, was putting emphasis on homogenization, ostensibly for accountability purposes. As Midwestern's Head of Institutional Research and Policy Analysis said:

North Central Accreditation is focusing on a continuous improvement model. This is a different model from the outcome level model being used by the state. The accreditation agency is more responsive to the differences among institutions but the state approach is not considering this. The state is enforcing standardization. They are looking at ACT scores, and now the Board is mandating that all seniors take the ACT. If they force institutional comparisons, this will impact the curriculum sooner or later.

Midwestern's 2000 budget had become an outcome-based budget. The Head of Institutional Research and Policy Analysis at Midwestern was concerned about the possible consequences of this change and the pressures from the State on faculty recruitment:

Now, we have performance-measure budgeting. They are asking us to show that we did a better job than last year. Our institution is also being compared with others at the state level, but funding is not keeping pace. The problem with all of this is that it is making it hard for public institutions to get the best faculty. Rising tuition is a problem, so it becomes harder to get more funding in this way.

Private institutions are not required to do outcome assessments. They have no incentive to do that. We assume private institutions are better, but they are not required to show they are better because we don't check their outcomes.

The pressures for measuring student outcomes and the emphasis on quantitative measures were also coming from the federal level. An example of this were current policies requiring the ranking of teaching preparation programs and the allocation of federal funds based on the performance of education graduates on the teaching certification exam. As the head for institutional research and policy analysis mentioned:

There are general pressures for quantifiable information. For example, the feds want to rank institutions that prepare teachers, they want to rank institutions by looking at the percentage of teachers passing the teaching certification tests. They have quartiles to see who is in the first, second,

third or fourth quartiles. Half of the institutions are in the bottom half. Even if 90 % pass the test, you may be ranked in the bottom quartile. There are assumptions of truth that no one has questioned. No one has studied if the teacher certification exam is or is not a measure of good teaching. No one is questioning this.

Midwestern University's response to the external pressures for accountability resulted in the development of a campus plan for evaluation and assessment with emphasis on student outcomes and a mandate for all academic units to submit a plan for the evaluation of their programs (Accreditation report, 1999). In addition, pilot studies were initiated to "investigate the viability of standardized tests as outcome measures, and the provision of support for outcomes assessment"(Head of Institutional Research and Policy). In the fall of 1999, the Office of Student Affairs at Midwestern began to implement outcome assessment activities and appointed an assessment coordinator. This office also began to conduct need assessments and outcome assessment for program improvement (Accreditation report, 1999). In addition, the Office of Instructional Support and Improvement (OISI) began to provide technical assistance workshops on outcome assessment for all campus units.

#### University Policies for the Evaluation and Improvement of Teaching

Midwestern University was an institution devoting efforts to the improvement of its teaching. This was evident in the different documents and policies at the campus level. A Teaching Evaluation Handbook edited by the Office of Instructional Support and Improvement (OISI) mentioned,

Since its founding, the teaching of undergraduate and (later) graduate students has been the central institutional mission of Midwestern University (p. 3).

The university's efforts to improve teaching were visibly increasing as a result of the pressures for accountability. The accreditation agency required "all accredited institutions to provide evidence of effective teaching that characterizes its courses and academic programs" (Accreditation criteria, NCA, 2000)

Midwestern University's accreditation report stated teaching as one of its main priorities:

We shall accord full value to our teaching mission, preparing our students for professional life, leadership, and citizenship in a changing world.

To accomplish its priority of improving the quality of its teaching, officials at Midwestern University created numerous initiatives for:

1. Strengthening the role of teaching in administrative decisions regarding the promotion, tenure and rewarding of academic personnel.
2. Developing of programs for junior faculty with limited teaching experience, to ensure that they receive adequate support for their teaching and research efforts during the years before tenure. In addition, provide mentoring for junior faculty.
3. Creating a new campus award to honor faculty members who have introduced particularly successful innovations, including active learning strategies into undergraduate instruction, especially those that involve students, and the use of instructional technologies.
4. Supporting faculty creation of discovery and capstone courses upon the foundations of their own research to give undergraduates at all levels an opportunity to develop a grasp of the characteristic features of this activity.
5. Capitalizing on research involvement as a teaching tool. Provide opportunities for undergraduates to learn by doing research with faculty members through different research fellowships. Faculty members share their research with first year students in small seminar settings via the First Year Discovery Program.
6. Supporting large-lecture format courses through the use of discussion session, technological aids, faculty development, and other appropriate means that promote

active learning and decreasing class size. Large courses need support in the form of discussion or lab sessions.

7. Using new technology in teaching such as computer-assisted instruction, e-mail and class-specific bulletin boards.
8. Ensuring ongoing monitoring of TA performance by faculty with oversight responsibilities. Departments are strongly urged to develop on-going evaluation as well as pre-service and in-service training in teaching assistants.

Midwestern created several awards and grants for rewarding good teaching. In 1998, there were seven campus instructional awards and three grants to encourage excellence and innovation in teaching. Other grants were provided to ensure and increase opportunities for faculty and students to promote and coordinate the development of new learning technologies and the use of technology in teaching. According to the accreditation report, there were thirty or so teaching awards. At the departmental level, there were teaching awards annually to reward the teaching of faculty and teacher assistants. Teaching awards were overseen by the Teaching Board.

In addition, the University increasingly stressed the role of teaching as a major factor in decisions about salary, promotion, tenure and the rewarding of academic personnel. According to the accreditation report, all professors going for tenure needed to provide evidence of thorough evaluation of their teaching together with a summary of their Teaching Evaluation System (TES) rating scores.

The Provost's communication for tenure and promotion allowed departments to use different methods to evaluate teaching quality, but gave strong emphasis to quantitative data. According to the 1999 Accreditation report, professors were required to

submit information from student ratings as part of their promotion and tenure papers (Accreditation report, p. 16).

Peer evaluation was suggested as a possible source of information, such as when two or more colleagues observed the instructor on more than one occasion in each course. Information from student alumni was also suggested as a possible data source. Anecdotal information was not considered a valuable source of information when coming from any of these data sources or from the student evaluation forms because according to the Provost "there was no basis for estimating the quality of those views. If information in this category was to be developed, it was expected to be based on a legitimate sample of (student) views." In general, student ratings scores received more importance than qualitative data about teaching. According to the Assistant Provost, student ratings were also the preferred source by campus administrators:

Most administrators prefer to use student rating scores rather than qualitative information about teaching because they like the convenience of the numbers.

In spite of the increasing importance of teaching in tenure and promotion decisions, as indicated before, research remained the highest priority for Midwestern. As Midwestern's Associate Provost said:

It is important to keep in mind that Midwestern is a research university, but teaching does get more weight than people want to believe. In our university it is essential for faculty to participate in research but that is not enough. A person has to be outstanding in research and has to demonstrate that he or she is at least capable of teaching. It is unrealistic, however, to think that a stellar teacher can get tenure without research.

As discussed in another section in this chapter, research and use of technology were part of the institution's philosophy of "good teaching."

### Campus Support for Evaluation and Instructional Improvement

Different units and groups provided support for instructional evaluation and improvement at Midwestern. According to the Associate Provost, most important were the Divisions of Assessment (DAE) and Evaluation and Teaching Development (DTD) of the Office of Instructional Support and Improvement (OISI) and the Teaching Improvement Board. Midwestern's Centers for Writing Studies and for Instructional Technology also provided support for teaching improvement.

#### The Office of Instructional Support and Improvement (OISI)

This office was one of the main campus units providing support for instructional evaluation and improvement. According to its mission statement (2000), the office had four main divisions:

1. Division of Teaching Development - This division provided consultative services to individual faculty members and teacher assistants and facilitated workshops and seminars to academic units, colleges, or the campus on instructional, course, and curricular issues.
2. Division of Assessment and Evaluation - This Division provided services and consultation to faculty and the campus in the area of instructor and course evaluation,

student outcomes assessment (including classroom testing), and the assessment of instruction and curriculum.<sup>2</sup>

3. Division of Instructional Media - This division assisted faculty in the design, development, production, and evaluation of traditional and computer-based instructional materials. The division also provided training to faculty and staff on the use of technologies in teaching.
4. Division of Engineering Instruction. This division assisted faculty in the selection, use and design of instructional media for classroom support. (p. 1)

Among the four, the Division of Assessment and Evaluation was the most involved with the evaluation of teaching. The Division of Teaching Development also conducted evaluations of teaching for instructional improvement.

The Division of Assessment and Evaluation (DAE). This division was one of the main units on campus conducting instructional evaluation. The evaluation primary approach used by the division was student ratings of instruction, but it also conducted focus group interviews of students.

The student ratings system or Teaching Evaluation System (TES) was a campus-wide-cafeteria-style model<sup>3</sup>. Instructors and departments could select among the 1000 items included in the TES catalog to evaluate their teaching. Items in the catalog<sup>4</sup> were divided into six main categories: course management, student outcomes of instruction, instructor characteristics and style, instructional environment, student preferences for

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<sup>2</sup> DAE' s staff also conducted research on the evaluation system and presented their findings at annual conferences of educational researchers.

<sup>3</sup> Cafeteria style evaluation involves "the use of a bank of items from which faculty can select those they consider more relevant for assessing their course" (Braskamp and Ory, 1994, p. 175). In Midwestern, the department usually selected a set of items for departmental comparison that had to be included in the evaluation form. Professors had the option to include additional items to those selected by the department.

instruction/learning styles, and specific instructional settings. At the time of the study, DAE was reviewing the TES catalog. The revised catalog was expected to include items in three more categories identified as campus priorities: active learning, outcome assessment, and technology. According to one of the instructional specialists working for DEA, the review of the TES item catalog will result in deleting redundant items and in determining areas in which more items are needed. The new catalog is expected to be accessible in the internet next year (2002).

The purpose of the TES system had changed over time. According to the former director of the division, the original approach was created to obtain information for instructional improvement, but over time the pressures for accountability influenced the use of evaluation data from TES in administrative decisions. At the time of the study, TES data were used for making administrative decisions and for instructional improvement. Because of accreditation and state emphasis on outcome assessment, DAE was encouraging the use TES rating scores for unit outcome assessment. As the head of the division said:

Since departments have to collect outcomes anyway, we encourage the units to use the TES scores for evaluating teaching. In the last meeting of the Teaching Advancement Board, we (DEA) presented a model that includes teaching ratings within institutional assessment.

One of the division specialists also added:

Given that North Central Office puts pressure on the university for measuring outcomes, TES ratings give more opportunities for faculty and departments to show evidence of outcomes.

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<sup>4</sup> The original catalog was designed using the suggestions from faculty members and administrators across campus. The system has been in place for thirty years.

TES survey forms included two "global" items used for cross-campus comparison and a set of specific items for departmental comparisons. The global items were used for making decisions regarding tenure, promotion, awards and salary increases. The specific set of items was used for instructional improvement. All TES surveys were administered in the last week before the end of the semester.

As part of the routine analysis, each instructor was compared to the other faculty at large across campus, subdivided as to teaching elective, mixed elective/required, or required courses. Then, a summary of the rating results was provided to the department head, and another copy was provided to the faculty member. Both summaries included a comparison of the instructor's ratings with other instructors in the department and across campus with respect to instructor ranking (teaching assistant versus professor) and the "required-elective" nature of the course.<sup>5</sup> As the head of OISI said:

There are two comparisons made on TES reports. First, if I taught Course X, my class mean is calculated and compared with the means of other faculty teaching elective, mixed elective/required, or required classes. For example, if my course is required, I would be compared to all faculty (across campus) teaching required courses. Second, my report will also show how my mean compares to all of the other instructor means in my department regardless of required/elective status. There are, however, no norms for comparing specific items. Instead, a verbal interpretation of the standard deviation is provided.

We also look at instructor rank when making comparisons. Both instructor rank (teaching assistant versus faculty member) and the required/elective nature of the course have been identified consistently by the campus research on TES.

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<sup>5</sup>According to the head of the division, the department head received a summary report of the TES scores but did not receive any of the raw forms filled by students nor information about the items selected by the instructor. The latter was provided only to the instructor.

In addition to providing evaluative information to administrators and instructors, the division published a list of "most effective instructors on campus." This list included professors rated in the top 30 percent during an academic semester. DAE was expecting to change the criteria for selecting the faculty for this list by next year. The new procedure will include all instructors who obtain student ratings of 4.4 or higher. As the head of OISI stated:

Next semester, we will use a different norm for selecting faculty to be included in the list of effective instructors. Instructors obtaining a score above 4.4 (required courses), 4.5 (mix/elective courses), and 4.6 (elective courses) will be included in the list.

The Teaching Evaluation System (TES) was extensively used for evaluating teaching assistants. As did the professors, teaching assistants were required to distribute the TES forms for evaluating their teaching. But, unlike the instructors, teaching assistants didn't need to obtain high ratings in both global items to be included in the list of "most effective instructors."

In general, the DAE head and staff<sup>6</sup> had a positive view of the TES evaluation system. They were pleased with the fact that TES rating scores for faculty across campus had been improving during the last ten years. They were working hard at revising the system and identifying areas for improvement. At the time of the study, they were conducting a review of all items in the TES item catalog and using feedback from faculty members and administrators for improving the system. A committee (a representative from the Provost's office, nine professors, the head and a staff member from DAE, and the head of OISI) was in

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<sup>6</sup> DAE staff consisted of the head of the division, three instructional specialists and a secretary.

charge of reviewing the TES system. According to one of the specialists working for the division, "They kept track of all complaints about TES for quality control."

One of the strengths of the TES system was its alignment with the latest literature reviews on student ratings of teaching. The use of global ratings for summative purposes and the decision to consider the required/non required nature of the courses when analyzing the ratings were consistent with the recommendations of the main researchers in the field, such as Marsh (19xx). In addition, the constant efforts made by the division's staff for reviewing and improving TES forms and summary reports were other strengths of the system.

The TES system, however, reflected the limitations of student ratings systems. One was the lack of consideration of many contextual factors that influence the ratings, such as the level of difficulty of the course, especially factors outside the control of the instructor, such as class size<sup>7</sup>, maturity of students taking the course, etc. In addition, important aspects on the validity of the ratings remained to be studied. The construct being evaluated was not defined in the evaluation forms, and it was likely that different stakeholders had different understandings of what was being measured as well as the meaning of evaluation results.

As a matter of example and to address some of the limitations of the ratings, DAE recommended that departments used TES rating results with other sources to evaluate instruction. They also provided departments with another optional service: course evaluation focus groups of students. These Focus groups were conducted at the end of the semester.

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<sup>7</sup> In 1999, a dissertation conducted in Midwestern by a doctoral student found that class size, course discipline, level, and student motivation were factors influencing the ratings.

They were centered on the specific areas or topics selected by the instructor or on general course and instructional issues suggested by DAE staff. One of DAE's instructional specialists said:

The course evaluation focus groups supplement the TES rating scores. We develop the questions to be asked during the focus groups with the instructor. If s/he doesn't select any of them, we usually advise the instructor to use certain questions. We also ask the instructor for a copy of his/her syllabus.

Typical questions that instructors were suggested to ask of students included: what they liked most about the course, comments on the classroom assignments, usefulness of course readings and changes needed for improving the course. DAE had a sample of these questions on the division website.

Once the data were collected, a summary report was prepared and shared with the instructor after the course had ended. According to one of the specialists working for DAE, the report included "a summary about the session, with bullets stressing the main aspects indicated by students." The division staff also provided instructors with a debrief session that lasted from 30 minutes to an hour in which they discussed the findings of the focus group. The purpose of the debriefing session was said to identify areas for improvement based on the results. If the instructor wanted to release his or her TES scores, the division's staff also looked at the ratings and discussed them with the instructor. According to one of the instructional specialists working for DAE:

People love the focus groups, they give them more information than TES rating scores about their teaching. Faculty really like it.

The DAE staff conducted research on the TES system and the student focus group interviews. A recent study comparing the results of TES ratings versus focus group interviews results indicated that students participating in the focus group interviews made similar comments to those they wrote on the back of the TES forms. Other findings indicate that students had a highly positive view of the focus group interview and that professors commented that the focus groups were more useful than the TES forms.

Another study (DAE, 2000b) focused on the underlying perceptions that students had in relation to TES ratings of instruction. Findings of this study indicated that students believed they were given sufficient time and directions to complete the TES forms. In addition, students said that they were fair and accurate when rating their instructors (this was found in both a survey administered to students and a focus group interview). The respondents also said that they believed instructors used the ratings for improving their teaching "most of the time." Students, however, did not have an understanding of how TES results were used for making administrative decisions. Other findings showed that the students did not see course and instructor as separate entities when rating the course effectiveness.

The Division of Teaching Development (DTD). This division was involved in the evaluation of teaching, and provided professional development to faculty and teaching assistants across campus. Each of the eight staff members of DTD was assigned to work jointly with different units across campus. Staff members were matched as closely as possible to the background of the faculty member or department to whom they were providing consultative services. Some of these services included the development of teaching

skills and instructional strategies, and the creation of new courses or course materials to meet specific instructional needs (Accreditation report, 1999).

Faculty evaluation, according to one of the instructional specialists working for DTD, was conducted here with the intention of identifying needs for professional development. The head of the division also stated that in some occasions they used evaluation to help departments in making administrative decisions about teaching:

Evaluation in our division is done for helping faculty to improve, but sometimes we make evaluations to help departments in making decisions by using different kinds of information. We are outside evaluators who work with the department. Sometimes we work upon department requests. We also talk to the department administrators when an instructor is doing something that is pedagogically fair, such as covering the content, being fair in evaluating his or her students, being respectful of students, etc. We see our role as supportive, our role involves helping people to succeed.

Although departments could request the help from the DTD staff to work with their faculty members, DTD did not provide any services unless they were directly requested by the instructors. The head of the division said:

Sometimes the department head calls and tells us that there is an instructor who is going to come to our division for help. But the professor needs to call us personally before we intervene. We don't have time to "hunt people down." Once the professor comes, we set a meeting. We let the instructor know they own the process, and that no one will step on their toes over the ownership of the course.

Once the instructor contacted the division, the DTD staff worked with the instructor in identifying areas for improvement. The evaluation was conducted with this purpose. As the head of DTD mentioned:

Professors come and ask for help, so we talk to them, visit their classrooms and talk to the department head. We ask the instructors what

they think is missing in their teaching. Then, we look at their lecture notes, and based on our experience and on what we talk to department head we decide what we need to do to help them. If the department head calls us and tells us that TES scores are terrible or that students are complaining, we have to take this into account. Sometimes we also do focus group interviews with students or videotape the class. Videotapes help us to get a notion of what needs to be done and to estimate how long will take to work with the instructor. What we do after we observe the videotape is all dependent on the case. Some people take a short time in improving their teaching, other need years.

One of the division specialists, however, mentioned that, in general, instructors do not feel comfortable with being videotaped, so they relied mostly on observations, giving special attention to what students were doing during the lecture:

Professors usually don't want to be videotaped. So, we rely mostly on observations. When I am in the classroom I pay attention to what students are doing. Are they taking notes? Are they paying attention to the lecture? What are they doing? Sometimes the instructor gets really snippy instead of being nice.

The head of the division added:

When we meet with the instructor, we prioritize what are the more important things that need improvement and select one that we consider the most important. We make suggestions to the instructor and usually check to see how they go once the professor implements them. Is it working? If not, what can be done? What can be changed? A lot of faculty felt uncomfortable with asking students (about how they like the changes).

Focus group interviews with students and critical incident feedback were also used to collect evaluative information for instructional improvement. Focus groups engaged the whole class early or at the middle of the semester. Critical incident feedback was used with instructors who wanted to learn something specific from their students. The head of DTD added,

Focus group interviews are not with a small sample of students, we do a whole class interview. They take place early or in the middle of the semester. It could be at the beginning for our observations to get a sense of where students and the instructor are. Later, we conduct interviews (oral or written) or paper surveys. Sometimes we contact prior students of the professor. We look for anything that helps us to "jump start" when trying to help instructors improve their teaching.

We also use critical incident feedback when a professor is doing something new and wants us to help him in gathering information about how students feel about the new method or practice... we can use the critical incident at the same time while the new practice takes place in class.

Once the focus groups or the incident feedback were conducted, the DTD staff met with the instructors and provided them with a brief oral report. DTD people did not provide written reports unless the instructors requested them. As the head of the division said:

We only write reports if the professor wants them. When providing a report from a focus group session we bring a description of the actual answers given by students as well as the frequency of respondents.

One of the instructional specialists working for the division added:

We usually don't give written reports from our observations, the only exemption are the focus group interviews. In this case we write a letter report to the professor. If there is a huge improvement on the ICES scores, we mention that. Any papers that we keep are subpoenaable, so I try to keep no more than a copy of the letter report that I give to the instructor. Only in a few occasions, our office writes letters to the department.

Sometimes it is not a teaching problem, it is a department problem. In one occasion, I observed a professor who wanted to arrange her course thematically but the department liked the instructors to do this chronologically.

Other times the department wants to support someone who is not a good teacher. A couple years ago, one department wanted to keep a professor who was a good researcher but not a good teacher. On that occasion it was easy to say what we did when working with the instructor, but there were some negative things and they did not want to hear that. No one wants to

hear negative things... no one wants them. Sometimes, our work is hard. You usually do what you can do, sometimes you can't do too much.

The DTD staff also reviewed course syllabi and other classroom materials to obtain additional information for identifying needs of professional development:

We usually ask for the syllabus and look at exams and assignments to see if students liked them. We don't review books because students don't know about this. What we have found is that it seems to be a correlation between people who don't use a textbook and having problems with students. Usually professors who use journal articles and don't use a textbook have problems with their undergraduate students.

In addition to the evaluation services, DTD staffers also organized seminars and workshops, an annual faculty retreat, and evaluation and professional development training for teaching assistants. Seminars and/or workshops were conducted for academic units and campus colleges. They focused on basic instructional issues across disciplines, or issues specific to the instruction of a particular content area or learning environment (Accreditation report, 1999).

The annual faculty retreat on teaching was open to all faculty members across the campus. The retreats began in 1995, and according to Accreditation report (1999), they provided faculty members with tools and ideas to enhance the classroom experience, and with opportunities to engage in dialogue with other faculty members across campus about teaching and learning.

The head of DTD was an adjunct instructor at the college of education where she taught a course on college instruction. The course, aimed at junior faculty and graduate students interested in teaching in higher education, embraced the philosophy that the skills for becoming a good teacher were the same skills required of a good researcher.

In addition, DTD provided evaluation and professional development to teaching assistants on campus. Approximately 75% of the 1000 teaching assistants received a teaching orientation. Most of the other 25% of teaching assistants received teaching orientation in their own departments. If units were not providing evaluation services for teaching assistants, DTD made available early feedback about their teaching (classroom videotaping and student feedback). According to the accreditation report, in 1990 Midwestern encouraged all departments to develop programs for training their teaching assistants and/or to use the services provided by OISI.

In addition to the teaching assistant orientation, DTD offered two Graduate Teaching Certificates designed to provide more in-depth training to teaching assistants. The Graduate Teaching Certificate focused on teaching development and its assessment. The Advanced Graduate Teaching Certificate provided a more extensive preparation for teaching. According to the accreditation report, these two programs included pre-semester teaching assistant orientation, microteaching, ongoing training, and classroom videotaping/visitation with feedback.

Not all teaching problems were included in the orientation and certification. A teaching assistant in science education who has participated in the orientation, told me:

This is my first year at Midwestern. The university is very lenient about teaching compared to the other universities where I studied before. The teaching orientation for teaching assistants was very useful. When I took it, I realized how many of my professors did not use the techniques that we were taught there.

In general, the orientation was good, but it was too general. I guess you can not include all the possible problems that could take place. As a teaching assistant, I am facing some problems that were not discussed in the

training: plagiarism and students adaptation to college. My students are mostly freshmen, some of them are struggling with the transition from high school to college. Plagiarism is a big problem, many of my students don't realize how serious it is and don't know the consequences for committing plagiarism.

Plagiarism and student transition from high school to college deserved more attention.

### OISI Views on Teaching

Before the data collection of the study had started, OISI staff and faculty members of the College of Education at Midwestern participated in a seminar on the ideal criteria for evaluating teaching. In this seminar, the head of OISI as well as members of the DAE and DTD stated their belief that there were certain principles of good teaching in which an agreement could be reached. This was consistent with the focus of faculty retreats organized for DTD, which stressed Chickering and Gamson's principles for undergraduate education.<sup>8</sup> OISI staff also stated that an agreement could be reached about ideal criteria. The head of OISI added that student learning could be the criterion and that "good teaching could be defined as everything that results in student learning." Other participants in the seminar disagreed with the position of OISI staff, claiming lack of empirical research and evidence that teaching principles, characteristics and behaviors, as criteria, could indeed produce student learning.

When the interviews took place, the different members of DAE and DTD who participated in that seminar exposed a different view of teaching. Most of them stated that

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<sup>8</sup> According to Chickering and Gamson (1987), good practice involves: (a) faculty student contact; (b) cooperation among students; (c) active learning; (d) prompt feedback; (e) time on task; (f) high expectations; (g) responsiveness to student learning styles. The DTD staff added three more principles of good practice: (h) clear organization and planning; (i) enthusiasm for subject and teaching; (j) fairness in grading and academic integrity.

they were not looking for general characteristics or criteria for evaluating teaching. Instead, they stated that they left to the departments and the professors the decision of defining good teaching. However, the head of DTD stated that based on their experience, they the meaning of "good teaching at the campus level:"

We are not like those professors (from the seminar on the ideal criteria for evaluating teaching), who believe that there are not general criteria for evaluating teaching. We know what the campus values as "good teaching" and use this as a reference point. We look if there is a match. For example, we pay attention if students are making sense of the lecture or not. If they aren't making sense, is it because they don't seem to understand it? Is it because the class is taught at a level that is too high for them? Is it because the instructor speaks too fast?

We value what students want. We want students to learn but not to be totally and completely miserable and unhappy in the process. Department heads would add to the lists of desirable attributes for evaluating teaching as mentioned by their students.

For example, the department heads may ask:

1. Does this person make a contribution to the Department by teaching large courses too?
2. Does s/he meet datelines? Does s/he meet with the class? Does s/he grade student assignments and exams on time? Does s/he provide adequate and fair tests often and soon enough?
3. Is the instructor teaching what s/he should be teaching? Is there a match between what is taught and what is described in the syllabus?
4. Are the tests too easy? Are they too hard? Testing is an important aspect. Is the instructor assessing students according to campus or department standards? Some professors assess too high or too low, and some might use a different way of assessing students. Using a different approach could be problematic because some people may see this as bad teaching.
5. Some departments are interested in the course sequence and the instructor's attitude towards students. Are students prepared for the next level? Do students feel respected?

The Head of DTD added:

1. Most faculty members present common problems. For example new faculty have problems clearly stating the objectives of their course. The objectives may not be well thought out. Or, they may try to teach too much content at a higher level. Maybe because of this, students have problems understanding their classes.
2. It could be that the problem is poor student assessment techniques. Some instructors don't write good tests. Or, students may complain about the organization of the course. Fair grading is a common area for improvement, this relates to instructor's knowledge of assessment procedures.
3. Another common problem is that the class is not fun, students perceive that the instructor is too busy trying to teach.
4. When teaching a large class, some instructors don't manage this well, or don't have a good feedback system for their students. Other instructors don't know how to use their TA's.
5. Another common problem is that some instructors don't know how to balance teaching and research. Some don't know the difference between quality and smart time. If a department knows that someone works hard in preparing a class, it may also be that the instructor is over-preparing.
6. Good teaching is also whatever the curriculum dictates. Sometimes people don't cover their course content as expected. Some even miss classes.

She also stated that in most departments professors did not have any problem with their teaching unless they obtained "poor TES scores or had received student complaints."

The DTD and DAE staff also acknowledged that they usually suggested that instructors focus on some of those bullets when they weren't sure about what areas to look for improvement. DAE' s head and her assistant claimed that in general the campus valued the use of technology on teaching, active learning and encouraged instructors to focus on student outcomes.

The head of OISI added that the university also valued a close relationship between teaching and research:

The university expects professors to be good teachers and good researchers. This is a research institution, people who come here want to do research. An advantage of having faculty members who are research oriented is that they keep up with the knowledge in their discipline. Researchers keep up with their field. They design courses based on their research.

### The Teaching Advancement Board

In 1996, Midwestern established a Teaching Board to improve the quality of instruction on campus (Midwestern Accreditation Report, 1999, p. 7). The Board was comprised of thirteen faculty members and assumed four main responsibilities:

- a. evaluate and foster specific forms of recognition for excellence in teaching;
- b. sponsor various forms of recognition for excellence in teaching;
- c. offer a grant program for course development; and
- d. serve as focus for development activities in support of teaching.

In its first three years, the Teaching Board implemented several new programs to improve the quality of teaching on campus. It created a travel grant program to support professors attending conferences focused on teaching and pedagogical issues, and it increased the number of the campus instructional awards (Accreditation report p. 47). Two main programs implemented by the board were the creation of a Teaching Improvement and Assessment (TIA) initiative and the Teaching Academies.

Teaching Improvement and Assessment (TIA) Initiative. Teaching Improvement and Assessment (TIA) was an initiative from the office of the Provost. The initiative provided

faculty with resources to implement new projects in three different areas: teaching development, instructional assessment programs and the implementation of instructional innovations.

Programs for teaching development and assessment focused on the use of strategies to improve instruction and its evaluation, such as mentoring, peer-observation, teaching portfolios, assessment, evaluation, and reward procedures. Instructional innovations, on the other hand, supported the development of new courses with emphasis on highly specialized courses, the development of course software, laboratory or any other equipment to be used to support instruction. In general, the initiative supported the overall use of instructional technology in teaching. Faculty members and teacher assistants were the two main audiences served by the TIA initiative.

According to the Associate Provost, the focus of TIA changed over time from assessment to instructional improvement:

The Teaching Assessment and Improvement (TIA) initiative was created 3 years ago. TIA focuses on guidance process and formative purposes. It encouraged the departmental development of procedures to assess its own performance and to improve it. Now, TIA also includes teaching improvement initiatives for faculty and teacher assistants, it is not only an assessment effort. The initiative also focuses on course development and the adoption of technology in the classroom.

With funding from TIA, the Teaching Advancement Board supported approximately twenty projects in the last 3 years. All of them focused on the three areas supported by the initiative but have some differences among them. As the Associate Provost said:

There is a half dozen projects currently funded. One of them is a project from the Music Department. This project focuses on individualized instruction. Another project is from the College of Law using technology

on teaching. There is also a project from Business Administration that focuses on teaching environment and peer evaluation in this context. It is not easy to think how to do a cross-sectional evaluation of these projects because each of them focuses on different targets.

The Teaching Academies. The Teaching Board also supported the development of teaching academies in different colleges of Midwestern University. There was an academy in the College of Engineering that worked in a partnership with the College of Architecture, another in the College of Agriculture, and a recently created academy in the College of Arts and Sciences. The heads of the three academies were well known for the number of awards for their teaching.

According to the Associate Provost, all the academies had mechanisms for sharing information about teaching, and about teaching styles. All of them were also effective in reaching new faculty members. According to him:

The focus of the academies is on excellence and innovation, especially in the case of Engineering and Agriculture. The Arts and Sciences academy is a new teaching unit. People at the academies are working with faculty teaching mostly undergraduate courses. The academies provide guidance about teaching styles, active learning, etc. The emphasis is in learning how to teach rather than how to interact with students. The academies, and specially the Arts and Sciences academy, provide an opportunity for young faculty members to meet with peers from departments. It helps professors to get a sense of a teaching core at the beginning of their career, and encourages them to think about assessment at the individual faculty level. The academies are initiatives that have a great deal of promise in encouraging change at the individual level. They offer help without making the instructor feel threatened. The academies are empowering for the faculty.

In addition, the Associate Provost mentioned that the academies focused on different organizational issues and were sensitive to differences among disciplines. For example, the

academy in Arts and Sciences considered the differences between teaching music and other more conventional disciplines, such as business administration. He claimed:

There are differences in Music and Business Administration in the way in which they are taught, both in content and the way in which the teaching takes place and is evaluated. The College of Music is looking for a better way to evaluate music education. What works for them is different than what works for business or other more conventional disciplines.

The Arts and Sciences (AS) academy was promoting peer-mentoring. In such, a senior faculty member worked with a new faculty member to discuss ways of improving his or her teaching. Faculty members participating in the mentoring also had the opportunity to interact with each other. In addition to the mentoring program that matched junior faculty members with senior professors, the academy provided faculty members and teaching assistants with a 24-hour faculty retreat, and four follow-up workshops. The associate provost pointed out:

The academy spread the costs of this mentoring, there is no need for each department to do that because it is done at the college level. This is especially useful for small units because this is a way for helping them to join in a partnership where they can find help in improving their teaching.

The academy of the College of Agriculture was also trying to help new faculty members in improving their teaching. The academy provided professional development seminars and symposia, student/teacher discussions about teaching, cultural diversity workshops and teaching enhancement grants. Professional development involved five steps: (a) initial contact with the participant; (b) pre-observation meeting; (c) classroom observation. (d) after observation discussion; (e) post-observation meeting; There were microteaching sessions in which new faculty members were observed by other faculty participating in the program who passed as students. This academy received support from

the DTD staff who conducted the classroom observations and provided feedback to the participants. A checklist was used during the microteaching and observation sessions. The checklist included aspects similar to those of Madeline Hunter's Teaching Model (1982). The head of this academy was a former teacher. He had a B. S. in Agriculture, a Master in teaching and learning theory, and a Ph.D. in Higher Education Administration.

The College of Engineering academy also provided support to faculty members and teaching assistants and encouraged the use of technology in the classroom. The main services provided by this academy were instructor professional development activities, course redesign, and use of learning innovations. This academy also had conducted a follow up of TES scores of the professors participating in its training. According to the head of this academy, TES scores of the participants increased after receiving the training:

The TES scores went up approximately 0.3 points when compared with both a group who did not participate in the program and ten participants before and after the program.

In addition, the Teaching Advancement Board also conducted a survey with different campus administrators about the evaluation of teaching in their units.

The Survey of Campus Administrators. At the time of the study, the Teaching Advancement Board was beginning to analyze the findings of an e-mail survey of department heads conducted in coordination with OISI staff. The purpose of the study was to determine how department heads and other executive officers evaluated and rewarded teaching when making administrative decisions about promotion, tenure, and teaching awards. Surveys were sent to 85 campus administrators of which 62 responded to the survey (73 % return rate).

The survey asked the administrators:

1. What was the percentage of weight given by the department or unit to teaching, research and service in the annual performance evaluations?
2. What sources of evidence were used to evaluate teaching performance?
3. How did they convert the information from the sources of data into a numerical score/value?<sup>9</sup>; and
4. Were they aware of other exemplary methods for evaluating teaching that they were or were going to use?

The survey findings indicated that different departments gave different weight to teaching, research and service, but the majority of them gave the highest value to research (20) or gave the same weight to research and teaching (16), service consistently was rated the lowest. Three departments stated they gave a higher weight to teaching than research.

In addition, in a department composed by three units, two unit administrators gave more importance to research than teaching and the other unit was said to give more importance to teaching than research. Five department administrators stated that the weight given to teaching, research and service varied depending on appointment level, and three

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<sup>9</sup> Although the Teaching Advancement Board encouraged the use of multiple sources for evaluating teaching, this question seemed to indicate the expectation for departments to reduce all the data from the different sources to a single score.

departments said it varied by content area. One department head said the weighting varied by faculty member. Ten departments did not have a specific weighting system and two were unable to describe their weighting system. One department administrator did not state the way in which they made decisions about teaching.

Most of the 58 respondents stated that they used student ratings as a source for evaluating teaching. Of these departments, twenty-two used student ratings as a single source for evaluating teaching, and thirty-six used student ratings with teaching observations.<sup>10</sup> Other sources used by the departments to evaluate teaching included analysis of course artifacts (e.g. syllabus, online exercises, etc.); student initiated comments to the administration (12); student focus groups (10); course improvements and development of course innovations (10); instructor self-report (8), among others. Six department respondents indicated they paid attention if the students of that particular instructor scored higher in National Board exams and they looked at student course selection. Another aspect identified as important for these departments was instructor participation in professional education committees.

Of the 62 respondents, 22 indicated that they reduced the information from several sources to a numerical score that they used to make decisions about teaching during the tenure and promotion processes. Twenty-seven stated they did not use a specific formula to convert the sources to a numerical score. One department used letter scoring; one resisted using a

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<sup>10</sup> The respondents did not clarify what was the focus of the observations, how and when the observations were conducted. They also did not specify how they used the numerical scores, once they had calculated them.

formula to reduce the data to a numerical score, two used qualitative analyses, one did not respond to this question, and one stated they did not know how the score was calculated.

When asked if they were aware of other methods of evaluating teaching which they considered exemplary, the department heads mentioned primarily the following methods: teaching awards (7), nominations for college campus or external awards (4); teaching or course innovations (3); and peer review (2). Twenty-five department heads did not respond to this question, and 15 stated that the question was not applicable to them.

The teaching specialist working with the Teaching Advancement Board in the conduct of this study mentioned that the Board conducted the survey in order to find information for improving the assessment of teaching and for identifying needs for professional development.

#### Midwestern Center for Writing Studies

To improve the quality of teaching, Midwestern also used its Center for Writing Studies. This center provided opportunities to faculty members and students for improving their writing, and for increasing the use of writing strategies in teaching.

One of the main programs developed by the center was the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC). The program provided professional development seminars each year to approximately 200 faculty members and 300 teaching assistants from 10 different countries and 60 academic departments across campus. These seminars provided instructors with customized help and encouragement to development their own techniques for teaching writing to their students. Instructors were encouraged to use writings as a tool for learning and for engaging students with the course materials. (Accreditation report, p. x). The head of the Center added:

The WAC program involves four days of seminars for the faculty at the end of the year. The aim of these seminars is to show faculty how to use writing in order to improve student learning.

In addition to the formal seminars, there was a faculty Writing Retreat each fall and other workshops held at-large and within specific departments. The Writing Center also developed over 50 writing intensive courses that have been certified for campus general education. The head of the Center stated:

In addition to the WAC seminars for faculty we offer seminars for graduate students. In general, during the seminar we (a) assign readings, (b) make faculty present their work; (c) and bring former workshop participants to share with them what they are doing.

We also have a retreat, it is smaller than the Annual Faculty Retreat and gets people from across campus. Our services are not only for people in the social sciences or humanities. We have people from LAS, Education, foreign languages, engineering, agriculture, even from Law school. We get faculty from practically all the colleges across campus. Each year we serve about 1000 faculty and students.

As indicated in chapter seven, Christie found this center especially helpful for improving her teaching. She found the activities provided by the center to be very valuable for help in working with her students.

#### The Center of Instructional Technologies

The use of technology on teaching was strongly supported at Midwestern University. Support was provided by for more than one unit on campus, such as the Division of Instructional Media (DIM)<sup>11</sup> which helped the faculty in the development of videotapes, slides materials, and the implementation of tech-classrooms. In addition, the Asynchronous Learning Unit on campus supported faculty members trying to use computers in the

classroom. The Division of Engineering Instruction provided technology support services to instructors and teaching assistants of that college.

The Center of Instructional Technologies was the main provider of technology support for faculty members teaching online courses or who used technology to work with students outside the classroom. In recent years, interest for the services provided by the Center increased. Its director said:

We have around 350 users by now. This is less than half of the instructors on campus but it is a high number considering that other colleges also provide technology support such as Education and Engineering. Technology use is growing on campus, we just had an increase of twenty five more users this spring. We expect the use of technology on campus to continue growing in the coming years.

According to the Director of the Center, the use of technology provided both benefits and challenges for the university. One of its benefits was to provide more opportunities for students to participate in class and to communicate with the instructor and other students.

According to the Director:

Technology is changing face-to-face interaction. Reducing face-to face time between instructors and students is Ok when time is not used very well, especially if the instructor is teaching a very large class. In large classes where time is a constraint, discussions after class using technology are helpful for student learning. Technology helps you to be in contact with the students in spite of the distance.

In addition, the Director claimed that the use of technology provided a more democratic way of teaching:

When you use technology you address a different segment of the class. Instead of teaching to the top students in class, you are teaching to the

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<sup>11</sup> This division was part of the Office of Instructional Support and Improvement (OISI).

medium of the class. It is a democratic way of teaching because you can reach a different audience.

Some challenges in using technology were identified by the Director:

Positive bias:

There is the perception that instructors who use technology are good teachers or are doing something towards improving their teaching. In some colleges there is an emphasis for faculty to use technology because of this perception.

Assessment

The use of technology on teaching brings concerns about how to evaluate non-traditional courses, such as online courses. We need to study more if the technology is positive or not for student learning. You also need to know where to draw the lines because technology allows you to get access to information about students. If you collect information for class purposes it is not ethical to use it for different purposes.

Costs and resources

There is also a time and human cost when using technology. Some colleges reduce the class workload for instructors who want to develop online courses, but most of them don't do that. So, creating a new course is extra-work for the instructor. I know a college in which faculty who want to create online courses get a semester off before teaching online, but this is the exception.

There is also a start-up cost when using technology. If you are going for review or tenure you shouldn't start using technology at that particular time. If you haven't done it by then, you should not start when you are at that stage, because this may not be in your best interest. It usually takes some time for faculty to do well when using technology, at the beginning their TES scores can decrease.

Inappropriateness of technology for all kinds of courses

Online teaching and the use of technology for teaching are especially useful for large classes, but it may not be the best idea for a class seminar. In a class seminar, face-to-face interaction is not restricted because these are courses with a small class size (approximately 15 students). So, the course already provides the interaction that is needed. In that case online teaching may not be the best choice.

You also need to think about the audience. Distance programs are not for all, you need to ask yourself if the online technology is appropriate for that particular audience. There can be costs for reducing face-to-face interaction.

Although the Director of the Center referred mostly to online-teaching and distance education, some of these challenges could take place in the other units supporting the use of educational media on teaching. The head of the Division of Instructional Media (DIM), sharing this perception, referred to other costs when using technology:

Using technology can be costly. For example, we are supporting the use of tech-classrooms. The cost of these classrooms is very expensive, approximately 60,000 dollars per room. Unfortunately, sometimes the cost of the equipment is not enough if the building doesn't have the capacity for using the equipment. We just put a lot of money in preparing a classroom like this just to realize after the investments that the building facilities do not allow us to have internet access. Keeping up with the advance of technology is also hard.

Risks to instruction from the use of technology are important and need further research on consequences and implications for the evaluation of teaching on campus.

### An Institutional Philosophy on Teaching

Although the interviewees stated that Midwestern University did not have a formally-stated philosophy of teaching, most of them said they believed that Midwestern valued a kind of teaching that allowed students to be actively involved in their own learning<sup>12</sup> and provided them with opportunities to develop scholarly skills. In addition, the

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<sup>12</sup> It is important to note that active learning was equated in many instances with teamwork although it was unclear how this was implemented and if just by working in teams was enough to consider that the instructor was using active learning.

respondents said they believed that Midwestern was strongly supportive of the use of technology in teaching and the measurement of student learning outcomes.

When asked about the meaning of the construct "good teaching," most of the interviewees referred to a kind of teaching that was liked by students. Even those who claimed to be sensitive to the individual needs of instructors and departments did not seem to have problems making comparisons among different instructors teaching different courses under different contexts and circumstances. The reduction of teaching evaluations to a single score<sup>13</sup> was a common practice across departments --as identified in the survey of department heads and interviews with the Assistant and Associate Provosts, OISI staff, members of the teaching board, and the directors of some of the TIA projects. An exception, were some members of the Teaching Advancement Board and directors of TIA projects who advocated the use of multiple data sources and procedures for evaluating teaching.

With the exception of one member of the Board, campus administrators were not concerned about the validity of the TES rating scores for representing the quality of teaching or as appropriate measures to be used as a basis for making tenure, promotion and other administrative decisions. This member of the Board said that Midwestern University primary responsibility was with the society that they served:

The evaluation of teaching (at Midwestern University) sees the student as a consumer. But students are only a small part of the society with whom we have the strong responsibility to serve. The problem is to define who is the consumer: are students? Is the State? Or is the society as a whole?

The evaluation tells you if students are satisfied as consumers. It doesn't focus on student learning. Students are not in a good position to appreciate

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<sup>13</sup> Scores obtained from the student ratings obtained from the teaching evaluation system (TES).

this. Current evaluations of teaching are not good measures for making inferences on student learning. Our main responsibility is with the society as a whole. The society will benefit or not from the students that we prepare. The evaluation of teaching should look at how well we are training students to serve the society. This should be a primary aspect to be included in the evaluation of teaching. We need to look at our graduates and see whether we are turning knowledgeable and capable people to the society we serve.

The problem with student evaluations at Midwestern is that they become strong incentives for faculty to focus on making students happy. This is not to say that we want students unhappy or that it is something wrong with them being happy. I also believe that currently the way in which we teach some of our courses is very threatening to women and minorities. Sometimes the teaching methods that we use make some students feel very uncomfortable in the classroom.

The perceptions of this board member were similar to those expressed by other faculty members in a preliminary study on the use of student ratings on campus (Cisneros-Cohernour, 1997).

### Summary

In the year 2000, Midwestern University was an institution facing challenges. Some required the improvement of working conditions and retaining of women and minority faculty, accreditation and State pressures for accountability with an emphasis on quantifiable information, and the need for improving the quality of teaching. It was unclear how much the pressures for accountability and for quantifiable information were affecting teaching and professional development of the faculty.

To address public accountability pressures and especially to improve the quality of teaching, Midwestern was implementing various policies. To improve instruction and its

evaluation on campus, it was providing support through awards and professional development activities. Northwestern had created its teaching awards at campus, college and departmental levels. In addition, the university was implementing campus assessment policies using a performance-based approach. Teaching was included as part of the accountability process because of the expectation of higher student learning.

There were two main units involved in the evaluation of teaching on campus, these were the Office of Instructional Support and Improvement (OISI) and the Teaching Advancement Board. OISI's work on evaluation was conducted through its Division of Assessment and Evaluation (DAE) and its Division of Teaching Development (DTD). The main teaching evaluation system (TES) developed by DAE relied primarily on student ratings of instruction. DAE recommended that departments use the ratings in combination with other sources for evaluating teaching. In particular, DAE conducted course evaluation focus groups of students to complement information obtained from the TES ratings.

According to various policy documents at the campus level and promotion and tenure guidelines, the TES student ratings had priority over other sources for evaluating teaching. The DAE approach was consistent with campus policies and with State and accreditation agency guidelines that also stressed the importance of quantifiable data. Course evaluation focus group interviews with the students provided additional information to complement the ratings, but they took place only if requested by the instructors.

Although Northwestern administrators appeared open to the use of other mechanisms for evaluating teaching in addition to the ratings, such as peer's and alumni review, campus guidelines for tenure and promotion stressed the importance of the ratings over any other

sources. The emphasis on the scores was consistent with university policies that stressed the need for quantifiable information as well as with the preferences of some administrators at the campus and the accreditation agencies. As the Assistant Provost said:

There are people at both NCA and at the university who feel more comfortable with quantitative measures because they can track them over time. I personally like to have both quantitative and qualitative data but not all people see the benefit from using qualitative data. We had a Provost who specially required the (exclusive) use of quantitative data.

OISI members said they were sensitive to departmental needs, asking the heads and chairs about any complaints made by students about ratings scores obtained by the professors in the TES forms. They offered to investigate any kind of problem and concern of the instructor. They conducted classroom observations and interviews with students as a requested by instructors. Their purposed focus was on identifying what students wanted. On some occasions, they asked students to express their opinion about academic matters for which students lacked the knowledge and expertise to respond.

Evaluation activities at DTD were conducted with the purpose of identifying areas for instructional improvement. The staff of this division provided professional development to both faculty and teacher assistants on campus. Professional development activities were said to be responsive to teacher needs but mostly focused on the trainable aspects of teaching with emphasis on Chickering and Gamson's principles for undergraduate education (1987). An important researchable issue here was how responsive this kind of professional development was to faculty and teaching assistants' views on teaching. The training, different types of teaching, and the trade-offs in selecting the teaching approach were governed more by reasoning, correlative studies and personal preferences, than by systemic research.

The other main unit on campus providing evaluation and professional development for faculty on teaching was the Teaching Advancement Board. This board provided support through the teaching academies, the Teaching Improvement Initiative (TIA), a number of campus teaching awards, and support for faculty development on teaching. In addition, the Board conducted survey research (but not validation) on the evaluation of teaching, such as a recent survey of campus administrators. The Teaching Advancement Board worked hard to support the use of additional data sources and methods for evaluating teaching on campus. Well known for the quality of their own teaching, most Board members supported the need for including multiple data sources and methods in the evaluation of teaching.

To support the needs of project directors who received grants from the Teaching Advancement Board, as well as to conduct research on teaching needed by the Board, OISI staff began to increase its responsibilities. They began to assign their specialists as support staff for each of the teaching academies. The OISI staff increased its support to departments and other campus units assessing their outcomes in coordination with other offices on campus. It is unclear how much the increase on responsibilities for the OISI staff was affecting their work on evaluation and professional development.

Members of OISI, the Teaching Advancement Board, teaching academies and TIA, Assistant and Associate provost expressed interest in improving the evaluation of teaching on campus. They stood behind the TES system without questioning the validity of the ratings as the main basis for making administrative decisions. Most central administrators were dedicated to finding ways for the university to provide evidence of successful outcomes. Few doubted the value of the accountability movement. Still, there were Board members who were

concerned about the use of TES rating scores for making decisions about teaching and promotion. One member of the Board was especially concerned with the emphasis that the university put on the TES ratings because she believed it could become an incentive for professors to pay more attention to make students happy rather than in making them reflective about their teaching. The trade-offs resulting from the decision of giving high emphasis to student ratings were given little attention at Midwestern.

The following chapter includes an analysis of how the policies and different initiatives to evaluate and improve teaching at the campus level influenced decisions in the college and department where Christie Evans worked.