

WHAT EVERY UNAC MEMBER SHOULD KNOW...

TEACHING EVALUATIONS



If your workload includes teaching assignments you should be aware that your teaching performance may be evaluated solely on the basis of the opinion survey that is conducted in your classroom near the end of each term. Student responses to survey questions that suggest “below average” teaching performance may be used to justify non-retention decisions or denial of promotion. Some faculty members have been surprised to learn that this data may be used for evaluation purposes even in cases where small sample sizes and very low response rates raise serious questions about their validity. You should not assume that an effort will be made to verify the impressions gained from student surveys by conducting an independent review.

United Academics strongly urges all new faculty members who teach to consider the possibility of collecting and presenting alternative measures of teaching performance. This may be done in a variety of ways. You might consider conducting your own surveys, or you may choose to ask one or more colleagues to observe your teaching and write a letter commenting on your performance. In the past faculty members have submitted portfolios containing letters of recommendation from successful graduates, letters providing external evaluation of student class projects, and other evidence of student performance. Think creatively as you plan and teach your classes and be sure to discuss possible alternative approaches to evaluation with your chair and other faculty colleagues. Factors such as individual teaching philosophy, your field of specialization, departmental traditions, and the nature of your teaching assignments should influence your approach to alternative evaluation.

It is essential that you provide those involved in the peer review process with compelling and objective evidence of your successful performance. If you have any concern regarding your teaching evaluations, please contact a representative of United Academics to discuss your situation. Surveys of student opinion play a useful role in self-evaluation. Students are often in a good position to comment on important aspects of a faculty member’s teaching and student feedback should always be taken seriously. In the end, however, it is clearly possible to improve upon a system of evaluation that is based solely on the standard student survey.

