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Key Takeaways from a virtual forum
Presented by *The Chronicle of Higher Education* with support from Adobe

SPEAKERS

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In recent years, students' expectations for the classroom experience have skyrocketed. If college administrators want to meet this demand, they must find new ways to train and coach the next generation of faculty — so that every instructor is performing at a high level.

On October 12, *The Chronicle* held a virtual forum to explore different approaches to a big question: How can colleges better invest in teacher training and improve the way they evaluate teaching? The following comments, which have been edited for clarity and length, represent key takeaways from the forum. To hear the full discussion, watch the recorded webinar here.

Ian Wilhelm: Abrar, could you tell me a little bit more about the origins of your collaborative and how it works?

Abrar Hammoud: Higher ed is constantly changing, our students are constantly changing, but the way we teach academics isn't necessarily changing. Most are trained to be researchers first and teachers second. And they're increasingly being asked to excel in the classroom. So we've established the teaching excellence collaborative. We provide instructors with opportunities to engage colleagues across the college to test promising instructional ideas, to promote teaching observations and to work with them to continuously rethink what their goals are in the classroom and as academics in general.

Wilhelm: Ginger, can you tell us about the Excellence in Teaching Initiative at the University of Southern California?

Ginger Clark: The university came up with a definition of excellence in teaching so that we could all agree on criteria that we could use to develop teaching and to evaluate it. The initiative created a number of development resources — for example, the Center for Excellence in Teaching, where schools could encourage their faculty members to get training.

The second stage of the initiative was really around USC schools' developing their own definition of excellence in teaching that was discipline specific, that used teaching strategies within their discipline as their criteria, and then created a plan to help their faculty reach those criteria and for peer review to replace student evaluations as the primary measure to evaluate teaching. And then the schools are supposed to examine and report out how they are going to reward teaching excellence.

Wilhelm: Let's talk more about evaluation. The problem isn't that universities can't pull together evidence of good teaching, it's that there's a lack of consensus on what they're looking for. And student feedback often becomes the default. Andrea, at the University of Kansas, you're supporting an effort called TEval. Can you tell us a little more about it?

Andrea Follmer Greenhoot: At the Center for Teaching Excellence, we developed a framework that we call Benchmarks for Teaching Effectiveness, which articulate seven dimensions of teaching practice. Those go way beyond the sorts of things that you might just observe in a classroom. They really

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are designed to help capture some of the intellectual work that happens behind the scenes when faculty are designing assignments, courses, looking at student learning, listening to student feedback, and making changes in response. We articulated all of that in a rubric. And then we have identified different forms of evidence from the instructor, from peers, and from students that might speak to each of those dimensions.

In 2017, we — along with colleagues at the University of Colorado at Boulder, and the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, and Michigan State University — received a grant from the National Science Foundation, so we had resources to work with departments on adapting this framework to evaluate and mentor faculty teaching.

Wilhelm: Student evaluations have been the default, and it's not a great one, for all the bias reasons. How do you give guidance to colleagues to judge a peer a little bit, measure them on how good they are? How do you do that in an objective fashion?

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Ginger Clark: Each of the schools needed to come up with their own evaluation process, but we didn't want them to have to become pedagogical experts overnight. We came up with a number of peer-review tools that were tied directly to the criteria in USC's definition of excellence in teaching. We made those tools publicly available, downloadable, and editable, so every school could adopt them wholesale, customize them, or use them as something to react against. It also had to be accompanied by a policy change, that there's an expectation of peer review.

   Those have come in steps, and we recognize that change in higher education takes some time to really sink in. We're making some progress. I'd say we're at about 40 to 50 percent full implementation. People are still relying on student recommendations, and we've had to go back and correct — "No, remember: You need peer review as your primary measure."

Hammoud: We've got a lot of complementary evaluations going on. We adapted the Career Framework for University Teaching, which was developed by the Royal Academy of Engineering, and we've mapped it to Purdue's recently released Framework for Teaching Excellence. We primarily look at four things, which are measures of student learning, professional activities, self-reflective practice, and then peer observations.

   We get the cohort members, who are new faculty members, into the mentors' classes several times in the first semester that they're here, and then they get into each other's classes, and then they are observed in the second semester.

It's important to establish trust, because the classroom's such a vulnerable space. We're hoping to demystify what happens in that classroom environment. And one of the additional goals for that is the development of empathy for the students' experience, as they're also being assessed.

Wilhelm: Are these tools optional for faculty? If not, what do you do to make faculty members receptive to them? Maybe this is a good segue into the broader conversation — how do you create a good teaching culture?

Clark: Participating in the development part is optional. The change in the evaluation standards at the university affects everybody, and so there's an incentive there, but we didn't want to just implement a change in the evaluation, make it a more rigorous process, without including a development aspect to it, because that's not fair to faculty.

One of the mistakes I made in this process was relying too much on faculty governance, because a lot of our faculty aren't really engaged in the governance process. They don't pay attention to what goes on in the senate. They're busy with their research, and so forth. And so I wish I had done more to engage more of the faculty at the different schools, had a conversation at the beginning of the initiative, to ask important questions like, "Does teaching matter here? What do we owe our students? What is good teaching?" And "Do we need to make a change?" It would be a difficult argument to make that the answer to "Do we need to make a change" is "No."

Had I done that, I think there would have been more buy-in from more faculty members. It was a big change, really fast. And so we encountered a number of faculty members who weren't very happy with what was happening. I wish I had been more ambitious in trying to reach as many faculty members as possible in the beginning to have them help shape what the initiative looks like.

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Greenhoot: There is this growing national dialogue about the transformation of teaching evaluation, and it's really interesting to look at the trajectory of initiatives as a function of their starting point. Did it start as a requirement, and then you had to build up the scaffolding for that, as happened at USC? Or did it start as more of a grass-roots approach, or something from the side like the teaching center at KU?

At KU the use of these tools is not required. But what has been our policy for years is that teaching evaluations draw on multiple sources of information — specifically, student ratings, information reviews provided by peers, and documentation provided by the instructor themselves. And so the way that we've approached this is

to try to develop the tools to help scaffold authentic implementation of that policy, because that's really where the gap was at KU for years.

The whole process of adaptation at the department or the school level has been really important for that buy-in. In a lot of cases departments don't make a lot of changes to the tools that we provide, but we really encourage them to convene their colleagues to build consensus around the tools, because that consensus-making process is so critical to actually making change. It helps them form a shared vision of where they're all going and get that buy-in.

Hammoud: It's not mandatory to participate in the collaborative. However, the expectation is that if you teach any class in our college, even if it's just one, that you will be a skilled, collegial, and effective teacher. We're hoping that with that expectation the faculty will reach out. We scaffold how they can map the work they're doing in the collaborative to their tenure-and-promotion document.

Wilhelm: Where are things at in terms of rewarding teaching in the tenure-and-promotion process?

Clark: Having the criteria of what's expected in terms of excellent teaching is important. There also have to be other rewards that bring it to the level of the stature of research. Named chairs and professorships, things like sabbaticals, teaching awards that have substantial monetary or other privileges associated with them — those are the kinds of things that have to be in place for faculty members to take this seriously. Otherwise, there's just a pledge that we care about teaching. If you're looking from the outside in, there's no evidence that anything's changed.

Greenhoot: At the University of Kansas there's quite a lot of variation from school to school or department to department in how seriously the evaluation of teaching is taken relative to research. There's a perspective that we've tried to encourage that if you want teaching to be taken more seriously in the promotion-and-tenure process, you have to have better evidence that feels authentic, and not capricious.

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