WIP - Building A Stronger Curriculum: A Comprehensive Model for Enhanced Evaluation

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Abstract

This work in progress (WIP) describes a proposal for a 5-faceted approach to evaluation. The evaluation of a course or academic program serves as a critical tool in determining whether the educational objectives are being met and plays an essential role in advancing the pedagogical practices within the course or program. These evaluations typically involve both student assessments and departmental reviews, providing a comprehensive perspective on the course's effectiveness. However, challenges often arise during the execution of these evaluations. In some instances, the feedback can be vague or convoluted, failing to offer clear, actionable insights into areas where the course or program may need improvement. This lack of specificity can hinder efforts to enhance the learning experience of students.

At Lincoln University, we are innovating beyond traditional evaluation methods to enhance the effectiveness of our academic programs. Historically, our evaluation procedures have relied primarily on end-of-semester student evaluations and sporadic, unannounced department head assessments. While these methods provide some insight, we recognize the need for a more comprehensive and nuanced approach. To address this, we have developed a "5-facet" evaluation model. This approach includes five key components: student evaluations of the course, student evaluations of the instructor, exit interviews with students, interdisciplinary peer-to-peer evaluations, and department head evaluations. Each facet provides a unique perspective, collectively offering a well-rounded assessment of both instructional effectiveness and course design. The advantage of this 5-facet approach lies in its ability to streamline the evaluation process while offering more targeted feedback. Instructors gain clearer insights into areas needing improvement, enabling them to refine their teaching strategies and course content more effectively. The ultimate goal is to ensure that our students receive the highest quality education possible. This paper presents the proposed 5-facet evaluation approach and details its implementation, while also examining the specific benefits and considerations of each component. Through this method, we aim to set a new standard for academic evaluations, one that better supports both faculty development and student success.

Keywords: program evaluation, interdisciplinary, course assessment, multi-faceted

Introduction

The evaluation of a course or academic program is a critical mechanism for assessing whether educational objectives are being effectively met. These evaluations not only serve as benchmarks for accountability but also play an essential role in advancing pedagogical practices within the curriculum [1]. By systematically collecting and analyzing feedback, educators can identify strengths and weaknesses, guiding improvements in instructional methods and curricular content [2].

A comprehensive evaluation framework typically encompasses multiple components, including student assessments, departmental reviews, and, where applicable, peer evaluations among faculty [3,4]. Student feedback provides direct insights from those who experience the course firsthand, while departmental reviews and peer evaluations ensure that these assessments align with broader institutional objectives and standards [5].

Recent research emphasized the importance of effective assessment practices in higher education, emphasizing their impact on teaching and learning outcomes. Gonzalez and Wagenaar [6] identified "assessment for learning" as a crucial strategy for educational improvement. Carless [7] highlighted the challenges of implementing and sustaining changes in assessment practices, while Brew and Mantai [8] examined the connection between assessment methods and student learning outcomes, reinforcing the necessity for robust evaluation strategies. Furthermore, Harris and Brown [9] provided insights into student perspectives on feedback, illustrating how evaluations shape learning experiences. Shin and Kim [10] reviewed the literature on student feedback, emphasizing its role in enhancing educational quality, while López-Pérez et al. [11] explored gamification as a novel approach to fostering student engagement and evaluation. Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick [12] proposed a formative assessment model that promotes self-regulated learning and effective feedback practices, which are essential for cultivating a productive learning environment. Additionally, Chen and Carbone [13] conducted a systematic review of innovative teaching and learning practices, reinforcing the critical role of evaluation in enhancing educational effectiveness. Collectively, these studies highlight the need for comprehensive, actionable evaluation methods that facilitate continuous improvement in higher education.

Despite the potential benefits of thorough evaluations, several challenges persist within the evaluation process. Feedback often lacks specificity and clarity, providing insufficient actionable insights to guide improvements in teaching and learning [5]. This ambiguity can impede efforts to enhance the student learning experience, as educators may struggle to identify precise issues or implement effective interventions without clear guidance [14]. Consequently, nurturing a culture of continuous improvement becomes increasingly challenging. This paper explores these challenges and proposes a 5-facet strategy to refine the evaluation process, ultimately aiming to foster a more effective and responsive learning environment.

Five-faceted approach method

The 5-faceted evaluation model proposed here is designed to enhance assessment of instructional effectiveness, course quality, and program success. This model combines feedback from five key components: student course evaluations, student instructor evaluations, exit interviews with graduating students, interdisciplinary peer evaluations, and department head reviews. Each component provides a unique perspective, creating a balanced, multi-dimensional approach to evaluation. Detailed descriptions of each component follow:

- **Student evaluation of the course:** This traditional course evaluation allows students to assess course content, specifically focusing on whether the material aligns with the intended course level. This evaluation will be conducted each semester, for every course taught, and submitted prior to the final exam. This piece remains essential because students are the ones experiencing the course in real time — their perspective helps us understand whether the material feels relevant, challenging, and well-structured from the learner's perspective.

- **Student evaluation of the instructor:** Conducted separately from the course evaluation, this component allows students to provide feedback specifically on the instructor's effectiveness in teaching the material. This evaluation, also conducted each semester for each course, will be submitted before the final exam. By separating instructor feedback from course content, we help ensure more focused, honest feedback on teaching style, communication, and overall classroom engagement.
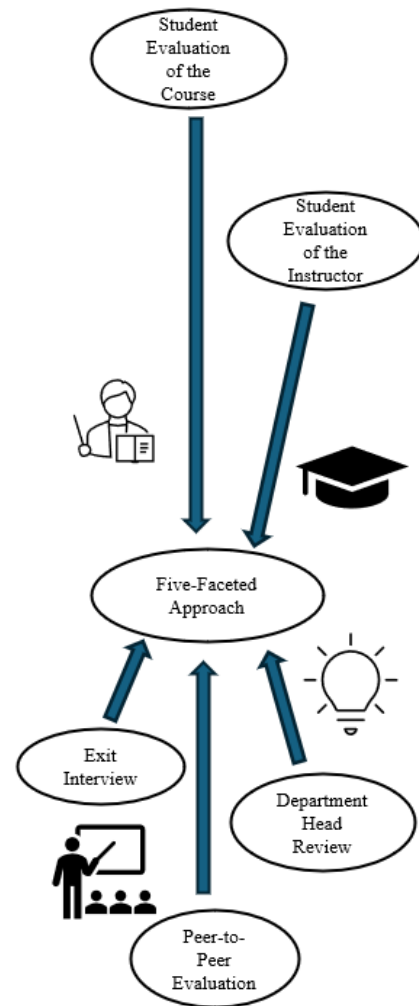
- **Exit interviews with students:** Individual interviews with graduating students will offer insights into their overall learning experience and perceived preparedness for their careers. These interviews will be conducted on a one-on-one basis. These conversations offer a chance to reflect on the "big picture" and often bring forward thoughtful feedback that wouldn't come up in a typical survey.

- **Interdisciplinary peer-to-peer evaluation:** In this unannounced review, an interdisciplinary faculty member observes a lecture to provide feedback on the instructor's teaching methods and effectiveness. This evaluation will be conducted once per semester. Bringing in a colleague from a different discipline often sheds light on things we might not see ourselves and encourages cross-pollination of good teaching practices.

- **Department head faculty review:** In this unannounced review, the department head observes a lecture to assess the instructor's approach to teaching. This evaluation will also be conducted once per semester. Having administrative oversight not only ensures

alignment with departmental goals but also reinforces that teaching quality is a shared priority across all levels.

Together, these five components streamline the evaluation process and provide instructors with targeted, actionable feedback across multiple areas of their teaching and course design. This comprehensive model supports instructors in making data-driven improvements that directly enhance student learning and success.

Discussion

The five-facet evaluation model provides a well-rounded and practical approach to assessing teaching effectiveness, moving beyond the narrow scope of traditional evaluation methods. The five components of our model were selected through a combination of institutional reflection and practical need. While informed by broad literature on assessment and feedback, this framework primarily emerged from observed gaps in our own evaluation processes — including lack of specificity, over-reliance on student input, and insufficient cross-disciplinary insight. Rather than replicating a single theoretical model, we crafted this approach to address local challenges while drawing from evidence-based practices.

Often, course evaluations rely solely on student surveys or infrequent department head reviews, which can lack depth and fail to capture a complete picture of instructional quality. By incorporating student course and instructor evaluations, exit interviews, interdisciplinary peer assessments, and department head reviews, this model ensures a more holistic, data-driven evaluation process. Faculty benefit from a clearer understanding of their strengths and areas for growth, as the model systematically blends qualitative insights with measurable outcomes. The inclusion of peer evaluations across disciplines brings fresh perspectives, while real-time feedback mechanisms allow for more immediate improvements. Unlike previous assessment models that focus primarily on student-driven feedback [9] or formative assessment techniques [12], this approach integrates multiple viewpoints to enhance reliability and reduce biases. By fostering a culture of continuous reflection and adaptation, this model not only enhances teaching effectiveness but also aligns faculty development with institutional goals in a way that is both rigorous and responsive to the evolving needs of higher education.

The implementation of the proposed 5-faceted evaluation model introduces a significant advancement in the assessment practices of academic programs. By integrating multiple perspectives—students, peers, department heads, and graduating students—this model ensures a comprehensive and balanced approach to evaluation. Each component of the model addresses specific gaps in traditional evaluation systems, such as the lack of actionable feedback and limited insight into both course content and instructor performance. For instance, student evaluations provide immediate, course-specific feedback, while exit interviews with graduating students offer a broader perspective on program effectiveness and career readiness. Interdisciplinary peer reviews and department head evaluations add an external lens to the process, ensuring alignment with institutional goals and pedagogical standards.

The discussion highlights the potential benefits of this approach, such as providing instructors with more targeted feedback and actionable insights, which can directly influence their teaching strategies and course design. The streamlined nature of the model ensures that faculty members are not overwhelmed by excessive evaluations, while still receiving constructive input from various stakeholders. Additionally, the inclusion of unannounced peer and department head reviews fosters a culture of accountability and continuous improvement, encouraging instructors to maintain high teaching standards throughout the semester.

Implementing this model does require some cultural shift, especially in institutions where evaluation practices have long been limited to student surveys and occasional administrative reviews. Embracing peer feedback, exit interviews, and regular interdisciplinary involvement calls for a more open, collaborative mindset. However, by framing these practices as developmental rather than punitive, we believe they can be integrated without disrupting institutional harmony—and instead, foster a more reflective teaching culture.

The model is not without challenges. For example, scheduling and conducting unannounced reviews may introduce logistical difficulties, while ensuring consistent and thorough exit interviews with graduating students could require additional resources. Furthermore, there is a need to address potential biases in evaluations, particularly in student feedback, which could be influenced by subjective factors unrelated to course quality or instructional effectiveness. Despite these challenges, the model demonstrates significant promise in bridging the gap between traditional evaluation practices and the evolving needs of modern academic institutions.

Conclusions and future work

In conclusion, the proposed 5-faceted evaluation model offers a comprehensive and innovative framework for assessing instructional effectiveness, course quality, and program success. By incorporating diverse perspectives, the model not only enhances the depth and specificity of feedback but also empowers educators to make data-driven improvements that directly impact student learning outcomes. This multi-dimensional approach represents a significant step forward in fostering continuous improvement within academic institutions, ultimately benefiting both faculty and students. We recognize that faculty and administrative buy-in will be essential to the success of this model. While no formal data has been collected yet, preliminary conversations with colleagues have been encouraging—many have expressed interest in receiving more nuanced feedback and see potential value in peer observation and exit interviews. As part of the upcoming pilot, we plan to gather structured feedback from participating faculty to better understand their experience and refine the approach accordingly.

Future work will involve the pilot implementation of this model across various departments to assess its feasibility, effectiveness, and scalability. Data collected during this phase will help refine the model, addressing any logistical or methodological challenges that arise. Additionally, research will focus on analyzing the long-term impact of the model on teaching quality, student

satisfaction, and program outcomes. Further exploration into the integration of technology, such as automated tools for collecting and analyzing feedback, could also enhance the efficiency and accessibility of the evaluation process. By iterating on this approach and addressing identified limitations, we aim to establish a robust evaluation framework that sets a new standard for academic assessment practices.

Conflict of interest statement

The authors declare that there are no known conflicts of interest associated with this work. No financial support or sponsorship has been received for this study.

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