

Name of Policy	Policy on Evaluation of Teaching and Learning	
Description of Policy	The Policy on the Evaluation of Teaching and Learning presents a framework for undertaking evaluation to ascertain and monitor the quality of teaching and learning processes and outcomes, and in turn to provide an informed basis for making decisions to enhance teaching and learning in the University.	
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Officer Responsible	Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic Affairs)
Contact Officer:	Director, IATL

Policy on Evaluation of Teaching and Learning

1. Introduction

Australian Catholic University is committed to high-quality teaching and learning, research, and community engagement. The Policy on the Evaluation of Teaching and Learning presents a framework for undertaking evaluation to ascertain and monitor the quality of teaching and learning processes and outcomes, and in turn to provide an informed basis for making decisions to enhance teaching and learning in the University.

Evaluation is defined in this Policy as a process of gathering information to develop understanding of one or more aspects of teaching and learning in order to draw conclusions as to its merit, worth or value, and to the factors that are helping and hindering its operation. An underpinning component of the process is critical reflection, based on sound evidence. The prime beneficiaries of such evaluation are lecturers and students, in terms of the enhancement of teaching and learning that they are able to promote and experience in the light of the evaluation findings. The evaluation process is in turn of benefit to Schools, Faculties and the University, as well as to other significant stakeholders, in terms of the information it provides and the decision-making that it helps to inform.

Evaluation is an integral element of the University's planning and development procedures, contributing to evidence-based decision-making on a continuing basis. As part of this, there are points at which the process is focused into formal evaluation exercises with distinct and discrete intended outcomes, such as course reviews.

2. Contextual issues

Teaching and learning comprise an educational partnership that exists within the particular context of Australian Catholic University. In evaluating teaching and learning, the unique aspects of this context need to be recognised and taken into account. These include, for example:

- the University's Mission-driven philosophy of teaching as student-centred, valuing the individuality, uniqueness and dignity of all staff and students;
- the recognition that evaluation is a value-driven, ethical process that must respect the rights of the individuals involved;
- the acceptance that evaluation is, primarily, formative in nature aimed at improving teaching and learning;
- the nature and extent of interactions between the lecturer and particular student cohorts and individual students;
- the extent and nature of students' contributions to and participation in the educational partnership with their lecturer and fellow students;
- situations in which teaching is a joint and collaborative effort, with both the individual and the team contributing to its quality;
- the potential impact of resources and settings on the quality of teaching and learning;
- particular characteristics and expectations of the discipline in which the teaching and learning are occurring;
- academic backgrounds of students;
- the number of students in the subject units;
- the nature of the subject units (core or elective);
- the level of the subject units (undergraduate or postgraduate); and
- modes of delivery.

The quality of teaching and learning can only be understood and evaluated in their particular contexts. These contexts generate both enabling and constraining factors, and an understanding of such factors and their impacts is needed in reaching evaluative conclusions.

3. Evaluation purposes and criteria

The evaluation of teaching and learning may be undertaken for a range of purposes, such as to:

- enhance understanding of teaching and learning processes and outcomes across the University;
- provide information that will assist individuals, organizational units and the University in making decisions about how to improve or develop teaching and learning;
- assist in determining the effectiveness of units and courses and in informing course evaluation and review;
- support claims about teaching and learning quality for probation requirements, teaching award applications and promotion applications;
- provide evidence for quality audit processes; and
- meet expectations of external bodies such as accreditation agencies.

In seeking to evaluate the quality of teaching and learning, various criteria may be adopted. These include, for example, appropriateness, inclusiveness, effectiveness and efficiency. The selected criteria and the rationale for their selection should be explicitly identified in planning an evaluation. The particular criteria to be adopted will depend upon the specific purpose(s) for which the evaluation process is undertaken. The purposes and criteria will in turn play a key role in identifying the particular evaluation questions to be addressed.

4. Underlying principles

The following principles underpin this Policy:

- Evaluation data collection should be conducted in a systematic manner.
- Multiple data collection techniques and sources should be used in order to access a range of perspectives and to maximize the validity of the process.
- A focus should be placed on convergence of evidence in drawing conclusions, while ensuring openness and transparency.
- Data collection procedures for each of the techniques and sources should be standardized across the University.
- The evaluation approaches adopted should enable identification of teaching and learning development that occurs over time.
- The use of aggregated evaluation data should not enable identification of any individual lecturer or learner.
- Evaluation data pertaining to an individual lecturer or learner are confidential to that individual, who may, in turn, choose to make them available to others in an identifiable form.
- The collection and use of evaluation data should be designed and implemented in ways that will foster teaching and learning as an educational partnership.
- Evaluation should be regularly undertaken to enhance teaching and learning at individual, School, Faculty and University-wide levels, with evaluation data being used to assess the appropriateness of existing teaching and learning contexts and to inform change where necessary.

5. Approaches to evaluation

The approaches adopted for evaluation of teaching and learning, and the particular requirements attaching to each approach, may vary according to the purpose(s) for which the evaluation is being undertaken. As noted in the underlying principles however, multiple data collection techniques and sources need to be used for any given purpose.

The following are identified as core ways of collecting data for the evaluation of teaching and learning in the University. Others may be added as appropriate:

- A teaching and learning portfolio produced by a staff member or an academic unit;
- Student ratings and comments;
- Reports from supervisors, colleagues or other observers; and
- Team deliberations involving, for example, a staff member, peers and students.

As a general requirement, student ratings and comments should be gathered on teaching and learning for each unit taught at least once every two years. This process will normally be undertaken by means of the Teaching and Learning Evaluation Program managed by the Institute for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning. The response rate should be taken into account when analysing such data, with care taken to avoid drawing conclusions based on very small returns.

6. Ethical issues

In undertaking evaluation of teaching and learning, due regard needs to be given to the rights, privacy, dignity and entitlements of those who are participating in or who are likely to be affected by the evaluation. This relates to all elements of the evaluation, including its design, operation and reporting and subsequent use of the evaluation data and findings.

7. Roles and responsibilities

Evaluation provides a fundamental component of the teaching and learning partnership. As such, it carries roles and responsibilities for each of the participants in the partnership, including lecturers, students, Schools and Faculties. Lecturers play a leading role in helping to establish a teaching and learning climate with their students that encourages and incorporates reflective evaluation, on a continuing basis, that is seen to carry benefit for their students, themselves, the University and the wider community. Students play an important role, not only as providers of critical evaluation data but also as co-contributors to the conceptualisation and implementation of optimal learning settings in the light of those data. Schools and Faculties play a supporting and enabling role, seeking to promote the use of evaluation data and findings in ways that serve the interests of staff, students and the University. All of the partners carry responsibility for providing honest and timely feedback to those who have participated in or who are likely to be affected by the evaluation.

These various roles and responsibilities imply an openness of process in which the intentions and procedures are clearly identified in advance and faithfully adhered to in practice.

The Institute for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning, in conjunction with the Teaching and Learning Evaluation Committee, carries particular responsibility for providing resources and staff development activities relating to the evaluation of teaching and learning.

8. Policy Review

The University may make changes to this policy from time to time to improve the effectiveness of its operation. In this regard, any staff member who wishes to make any comments about this policy may forward their suggestions to the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic Affairs).

9. Further Assistance

Any staff member who requires assistance in understanding this policy should first consult his/her nominated supervisor who is responsible for the implementation and operation of these arrangements in the work area. Should further advice be needed, the staff member should contact the Director, Institute for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning.

10. Links to other documents and policies

This Policy underpins and complements other documents and policies of the University that in turn provide detailed and specific requirements, guidelines and advice. These include:

- Procedures for Course Approval, Amendment and Review – Higher Education Courses;
- Procedures for Course Approval, Amendment and Review – Non-Award Courses;
- Academic Staff Probation Policy and Procedures;

- Academic Staff Review – Planning Program: Policies and Procedures;
- Excellence in Teaching Awards; and
- Academic Staff Promotion Policies and Procedures.