

Department of Religion  
Plan for Formative Evaluation of Teaching

I. Formative Evaluation procedures for Untenured Faculty.

A. Introduction:

- This plan will be reviewed within three years at a minimum and will be reviewed/rewritten with the participation of any new tenure-track members of the department when they begin their service in the Department of Religion.
- This plan seeks to give the untenured faculty member as much control over the process of formative evaluation as possible.
- Our Department of Religion is small and our workload is heavy. We seek a plan that is manageable given that workload, and even this plan stretches our resources.

B. Mentoring:

- The department will choose a tenured member of the staff to work with the untenured member of the staff over the term of his or her review. The preferences of the junior member and agreement by the senior member will be critical components of the selection process. Appointment of the mentor will be subject to review by the department. This tenured member will be appointed after the first semester of the junior faculty person's first year.
- The tenured mentor will advise the untenured faculty member regarding the department culture and teaching goals and our departmental expectations for work load and grading, help the untenured member interpret various aspects of the ongoing formative evaluation, consult with the untenured member on Denison student culture and expectations, consult on syllabi and course materials, point to resources and offices of the college that aid teaching and learning at Denison, and in general be available to the untenured member over the term of his or her review.
- The mentor and the untenured professor should meet with the department chair at least once a year to review what the various evaluation tools reveal regarding the instructor's strengths and weaknesses and to discuss suggestions for improvement where indicated.

- The mentor should provide the instructor with written descriptions of the instructor's strengths and weaknesses and summaries of discussions regarding areas of improvement.
- The department strongly recommends that the mentor and the untenured professor jointly maintain a full file of all relevant material to assist in the long-term formative evaluation.
- The department will encourage the untenured faculty member to have an informal mentor outside of the department, although the department assumes that the new faculty member will find a mentor through the Denison mentoring program and the department need not know who that person is.

C. Class Room Observations:

- Tenured department members will observe three courses over the untenured faculty member's three-year term of review – one series of classroom observations each year. The first course to be observed will be the new professor's favorite course. The other two courses to be observed in the second and third years will be a 100 level introductory course and a 200 level core course.
- There will be at least two visits, preferably three visits, in each course (see above) over the semester. There are two patterns of visitation we would encourage: a) distributed visits – one near the beginning of the year, one toward the middle of the year and one near the end of the year; b) sequential visits – class room visits on successive class days.
- Typically the observer will meet twice with the professor being observed—once before and once immediately after the actual class or sequence of classes. In the first meeting, the observer will become familiar with teacher's plans for the day/days (where this class fits into his or her plans for the semester, and so forth) and in the second, very soon after the class(es) observed, the observer will be able to give feed back.
- The mentor and one other faculty member (rotated yearly among the department members over the course of the review period) will do the visits of the junior faculty person's class for each course being observed (see above)

- The department will establish guidelines for the observer regarding the kinds of teaching goals and values we look for in our classes. The observer will provide a written response in reference to these guidelines to the untenured faculty member being observed and this will constitute a record of the visit and a reminder of comments made by the observer.
- The department encourages reciprocal classroom visits, that is, the junior faculty person will not only be observed but will be invited to sit on senior members' classes.

D. Denison University typically seeks considerable student feedback on teaching.

- The department will use the standard form (the same form developed for summative evaluation) accepted by the faculty on October 3, 2002, and may develop an addendum to that form asking the students to respond to additional questions regarding teaching expectations the department deems important. The results of these end-of-year course evaluations will be maintained and discussed by the untenured department member and his or her mentor.
- On selected courses, the department will seek feedback from students a year or two after they have completed the courses when they often have a better sense of the value of a course or the strengths and weaknesses of an instructor than in the final week of a course.
- The department may appoint a tenured colleague (perhaps the mentor) to monitor a discussion with selected students of the untenured professor's teaching, a summary of which will be provided to the professor being reviewed for inclusion in his or her file and that of the mentor. Such a discussion would happen at least once in the review cycle but not in the same year as the summative evaluation.

E. The department is interested in nurturing an atmosphere of collegial support and cohesiveness.

- As a department, we regularly meet once a week throughout the academic year and generally share tasks and consult regarding departmental requirements, teaching assignments, comprehensive exams, and directed, independent and senior research with individual students. All of these discussions will

contribute to the untenured faculty member becoming an integral part of the department.

- At least one meeting each year will be devoted specifically to a discussion of teaching goals, collaborative learning, common interests across our courses, and so forth.
- The department will begin to establish a small library on teaching and evaluation resources.

F. A significant part of the evaluation process is of course the self-reviews made by the instructor.

- We recommend that the instructor discuss the self-reviews with his or her mentor and perhaps with both the mentor and department chair at their once a year meeting.
- The instructor (and possibly his or her mentor) should keep a portfolio of self-reviews written during the entire term of the Tenure process along with other materials collected for formative evaluation.

## II. Formative Evaluation of Tenured Members of the Department.

A. *The Handbook for Formative Evaluation of Teaching* notes that “The purpose of formative evaluation is to assist both junior and senior faculty members in becoming effective instructors.” We recognize that the hierarchical relationship inherent in formative evaluation of junior members of the department is trickier and perhaps inappropriate among tenured colleagues.

B. The Department will set up a program in which tenured members pair with one another over a term of their reviews to arrange reciprocal class observations and perhaps make presentations in their partner’s classes, discuss shared teaching goals and methods, and informally “mentor” one another. These dyads will rotate within the department so that over the course of several years each member will have been paired with each other.

C. Other sources and goals of formative evaluation that are available to untenured members will be, of course, available to senior members – including departmental discussions, department library on teaching and evaluation, student evaluations, and their own self-reviews.

## ADDENDUM: DEPARTMENT STATEMENT OF CONTENT GOALS AND PEDAGOGICAL GOALS

### **Content Goals:**

1. introducing students to the study of religion as a field of academic and intellectual inquiry within the liberal arts;
2. helping students understand how the academic study of religion connects and intersects with other disciplines in the academy;
3. teaching students how scholars engage in theological reflection, interpret sacred texts, analyze ethical dilemmas, and engage in comparative study;
4. helping students develop a critical consciousness of and a sense of responsibility for nature, history, and the structures of society;
5. critically studying interactions between religions and cultures and how they lead to a how a variety of distinct religious voices;
6. critically examining how different religious traditions interact with one another;
7. helping students prepare, when appropriate, for professional and academic careers.

### **Pedagogical Goals:**

1. developing a classroom experience and assignments that encourage students to reflect critically on their inherited cultural wisdom, especially in areas such as religious traditions, political and social arrangements, epistemological judgments, ethical standards, and preferred relationships with other traditions and cultures;
2. developing a classroom experience and assignments that help students improve on their critical skills related to reading texts, analyzing arguments, evaluating perspectives, presenting arguments, and monitoring their own progress in these areas;
3. developing a classroom experience and assignments that teach students to express themselves clearly, concisely, and persuasively;
4. developing a classroom that encourages students to engage in dialogue with the instructor and with one another;

5. developing a classroom experience and assignments that encourage students to engage in collaborative and cooperative modes of learning;
6. developing a classroom experience and assignments that help students analyze various standpoints, learn to play with ideas, and understand how people of good will can disagree on important and significant issues;
7. developing a classroom experience and assignments that help students develop the skills that will enable them to engage in independent research, not only in college, but also when they graduate;
8. engaging the students intellectually outside of the classroom setting;
9. showing interest in the students' personal and academic development and treating students with respect;
10. developing goals for each course, and plans to realize these goals, that are consistent with the mission of the Religion Department and are communicated to the students;
11. working to create assessment exercises (e.g., exams and papers) that promote further learning as well as evaluate student progress;
12. communicating engagement and commitment to academic study in general and the study of religion in particular;
13. enabling each instructor to use pedagogical practices and instructional materials that allow that instructor best to contribute to student learning.