

Teaching documentation

One thing I am seeing in many tenure binders is a summary of teacher evaluations. The format is:

Course Name, section, semester	
Things students liked about the course (quotes from teacher evaluations)	Instructor response (if any)
Things students didn't like about the course (quotes from teacher evaluations)	Instructor response (if any)

I think it is beneficial for a variety of reasons.

1. It shows that you care about student happiness and are reading the evaluations. I can think of many cases where a teacher is mystified as to why they got low teacher evaluation scores from a class, but in reading the evaluations, the problems are in flashing neon. In reading evaluations, read them once (and if needed, get angry). Then put them away for a few days. Read them again looking for hidden bits of wisdom. Students know why they are unhappy, and often they can tell the instructor exactly what to do differently. They may say outrageous things like, "This instructor doesn't care about his students." You get mad and say, "I do too care. I do X. I do Y. I do Z." The question to ask yourself is, "Why would someone have said that?"

2. It allows you to show that you are receptive to comments, and that you are able to improve your course.

3. It also allows you to defend yourself. We realize that not everything students say is fair or true. If you have low scores, you can explain why and what you are doing to improve. Over time, this provides a compelling history of gradual improvement. Sometimes the students are unreasonable. This format gives you a chance to say, "Students are concerned because grading was unfair. They were under the impression that they could work together. I told them that was illegal and deducted points for such behavior. That made many angry. I have now updated my syllabus to clearly state examples of permissible and non-permissible working together." Or, "Students said that I went too rapidly. I am following established rate for the class. I think the problem is that they are not properly prepared for the class. In particular, they should know about linked lists, but they are very weak. Some students say that their previous instructor just put the linked list code on the board, which they copied into their notes, and into the assignment. This level of experience with pointers is insufficient. Next semester, I will give a review assignment on pointers the first week of the class. That will either get students up to speed or inform them that they are missing too much from the prerequisite course to succeed in this course. I have visited with Drs. X, Y, and Z to try to understand the coverage of linked lists in the prerequisite course. I have also visited with Drs. W and L (who teach this same class) about their perceptions of weak preparation. I intend to give a pretest to assess preparation and provide a series of online tutorials to help them review required material. "