

**From:** [Office of the MSU Provost](#)  
**Subject:** Temporary Modifications of Teaching Assessments for Spring 2020  
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**MONTANA**  
STATE UNIVERSITY

Office of the Provost

## Temporary Procedural Modifications of Teaching Assessments for Spring 2020

April 13, 2020

Dear Colleagues,

At Montana State University, we share a common understanding now and in future review cycles that student and faculty peer evaluations of teaching were obtained in a different context in Spring 2020 and these evaluations will not have the same pertinence to the review of a faculty's teaching performance because of the unprecedented transition that occurred mid-term from in-person teaching to remote delivery of teaching.

The focus on teaching assessments for Spring 2020 should be on what worked well and what didn't work, what was learned, what was tried and what lessons can be used to improve teaching and learning in the future, regardless of teaching modality.

Identified herein are temporary modifications for assessing faculty teaching as a result of rapid changes in teaching modalities that were necessitated in response to the coronavirus pandemic. These modifications were developed collaboratively by Montana State University Faculty Senate, the Center for Faculty Excellence and the Office of Academic Affairs.

If there are other adaptive changes to policies and procedures that a unit believes is necessary and are not addressed in these modifications, then the units are asked to quickly identify specific changes and to propose them to the URTPC chair for approval.

In summary, the modifications are intended to:

- Provide clarity to faculty regarding the administration and use of student and peer teaching evaluations from Spring Semester 2020 term for Retention, Tenure and Promotion (RTP) and annual reviews,
- Ensure that faculty are not inappropriately held responsible for teaching

evaluations that reflect factors outside their control,

- Maintain the process of continuous improvement in teaching practices, and
- Provide a mechanism for students to evaluate faculty instruction.

### **1. Student Evaluations of Teaching:**

- a. Online student evaluations of teaching will be conducted as usual, using the existing online tool and questions.
- b. The expectation of a nuanced approach to the interpretation of student evaluations does not change.
- c. All faculty will be given the opportunity, after receiving their Spring 2020 course evaluations, to opt-in to use data from any or all of Spring Semester 2020 courses for future RTP and annual reviews.
- d. Faculty, unit administrators and review committees will be provided guidance on how to best utilize Spring 2020 course evaluation data for annual review and RPT processes.

### **2. Faculty Performance Assessments for Retention, Tenure & Promotion, and Annual Reviews:**

- a. Unless the faculty chooses to use one or more Spring 2020 course evaluations for annual review or RPT, those course evaluations will not be used in faculty performance reviews.
- b. Results of Spring 2020 course evaluations will be distributed only to the faculty instructor of record.
- c. Faculty who choose (opt-in) to use Spring 2020 student evaluations for annual or RTP reviews will be responsible for ensuring that the results are available in the appropriate format and relevant systems.
- d. Faculty who choose to opt-in should download the pdf version of their evaluations from Campus Labs and attach the document to their Activity Insight annual review form or include the saved pdf in their RTP dossier materials.
- e. Written guidance will be provided at annual trainings for faculty and reviewers addressing fair and consistent interpretations of either the presence or the absence of teaching evaluations from Spring 2020 term in RPT and annual review materials. This guidance will be a standard training component in subsequent years to ensure consistency among new reviewers and new committee members.

### **3. Peer Evaluations of Teaching:**

- a. If in-class observations of teaching by peers were not completed prior to cessation of face-to-face classroom instruction in Spring 2020, and a unit's Role and Scope documents require peer evaluations as part of the teaching portfolio, this requirement will be met with a peer-evaluation that utilizes other available indicators and evidence of teaching that demonstrate how a candidate meets the unit's standards.

- b. Where necessary, units will be encouraged to use existing practices of assessing teaching that do not require in-class observations.
- c. Department Heads and Directors will be encouraged to work with their faculty to ensure the processes, indicators and measures of peer evaluations of teaching are valid and not reliant on in-class observations.

*\*Reference to Faculty in this notification applies to all MSU instructors of record, including: tenured, tenure-track, non-tenure track, adjunct, GTA and employees who taught courses in Spring 2020.*

Sincerely,

Eric Austin  
Chair of Faculty Senate

Bob Mokwa  
Provost and Executive Vice President of Academic Affairs  
Montana State University

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