

The University of Texas at El Paso

Dear Dr. Nunez-Mchiri,

The Teaching Effectiveness and Development Committee seeks the support of the Faculty Senate and the Provost to share the following statement with Deans, Department Chairs, and Faculty at The University of Texas at El Paso.

To keep our community healthy during the COVID19 pandemic, our university transitioned to online instruction in the spring semester and continued during the fall semester. In the beginning of the fall semester, about 75% of the courses were online, 20% hybrid, and only about 5% maintained a face-to-face format. Given the rise in COVID19 infections in our community, by the end of the fall, most hybrid courses have transitioned to fully online.

During this transition, the university provided faculty support and resources through different programs including technology facilitation, Blackboard assistance, instructional design, Grab-N-Go tips, webinars, and employee assistance, among many others.

Despite the abundance of resources and information, the implementation of online instruction has presented significant challenges for faculty. Many faculty and students had to learn and adapt to online instruction through trial and error in an extremely short period. The time commitment required for teaching increased substantially, as faculty revamped their courses and provided individualized plans for students struggling with illness; while also seeking to keep up with research and service duties. Furthermore, some faculty dealt with COVID-19 in their own households and shared workspaces with children and family.

Under these circumstances, student evaluations alone might not accurately reflect the faculty's effort and teaching competence. For this reason, without jeopardizing our commitment towards high quality instruction, we encourage faculty and administrators to embrace a flexible and holistic approach in the teaching evaluation process of part-time and full-time tenure and non-tenure track faculty this year. Teaching evaluations could take into account individual circumstances, patterns of performance over time, and overall trends. Each college and department can determine how to be flexible regarding teaching evaluations and how to document faculty efforts and hardships during this period. For example, merit review committees could offer faculty the option to supplement their students' teaching evaluations with a document detailing their adaptation efforts, teaching innovations, technological and pedagogical training, as well as challenges faced during the pandemic.

Teaching evaluations are an important source of information in faculty's applications for promotion, tenure, contract renewals, merit salary increases, and teaching awards. Embracing a holistic and flexible approach during this period can provide college and department merit review committees with additional data to make informed decisions. Although this statement refers to evaluations of teaching performance, a similar process could be devised for evaluations of research and service.

Respectfully,

Dr. Fernando R. Jiménez, TEDC Chair