

Teaching excellently: Assessment and valuation of teaching at McMaster

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ABSTRACT

For decades, the notion of *teaching excellence* has had a place in both informal and formal discourses about the quality of teaching at McMaster University. But what does teaching excellently entail, exactly? How is this defined, measured, and rewarded? This chapter seeks to explore how teaching excellence is defined and evaluated at McMaster University, particularly in the context of the evaluation of faculty teaching. First, a review of several historical and contemporary examples of how teaching excellence has shown up in McMaster documents will be presented. Then, interviews conducted in 2021 with McMaster students, staff, faculty, and senior administrators about their current perceptions of teaching excellence and assessment of teaching excellence—which speak to change over time, current considerations, and future directions—will be presented. Finally, the implications surrounding the understanding and assessment of teaching excellence at McMaster will be explored.

KEYWORDS

teaching excellence, evaluating teaching, university policies, history, perceptions

A phrase one might hear used to describe McMaster University, whether from a current employee, prospective student, or colleague from another higher education institution, is *teaching excellence*. It is no coincidence. Today, the phrase “teaching excellence” can be found in both informal discourses (e.g., discussions and work at the student, faculty, and departmental level) and formal discourses (e.g., McMaster communications via their website and official policy and practice documents). These more formal discourses use the language of teaching excellence to describe McMaster’s teaching and learning culture (McMaster University, n.d.a), spotlight the university’s international reputation (McMaster University, n.d.b), and—of particular importance to faculty—describe how teaching is evaluated in formal

processes, including tenure, permanence, and promotion (McMaster University, 2011, 2018).

Use of the phrase “teaching excellence” has been prevalent for decades. Looking through the archives of McMaster’s teaching and learning centre, the Paul R. MacPherson Institute for Leadership, Innovation and Excellence in Teaching (MacPherson Institute), we find that, by the late 1970s, teaching excellence was framed as the ideal, a standard to work towards via formal evaluation of faculty teaching. The 1978 *Report & Recommendations on the Evaluation of Teaching* prepared by the Instructional Development Centre¹ for the McMaster President’s Committee on Teaching and Learning, for example, states that “encouraging teaching excellence” is the primary purpose of the evaluation of teaching (p. 28). This perspective informed the work being done at that time to design McMaster’s methodologies for evaluating teaching, as described in McMaster’s first *University Policy on the Encouragement of Teaching Excellence by Means of the Evaluation of Teaching*, approved by Senate in June 1979 (see chapter by de Bie et al., 2022 in this volume for further history on the development of this policy).

Many groups were involved in advocating for and contributing to processes for evaluating teaching at the university, which would become formalized in this policy. For example, Thompson’s 1977 work on behalf of the McMaster Students Union highlighted the importance of examining multiple activities, rather than focusing on research output alone, when considering faculty career advancement. Writing about the university’s history from 1957–1987, Greenlee (2015) states that, in an era when McMaster was growing and changing, there came a call from society at large for accountability for all activities that encompass a professor’s role. Indeed, the McMaster Students Union (MSU; 1978) report highlighted the need for appropriate supports to foster teaching excellence, and the President’s Committee on Teaching and Learning (1978) report expanded on the MSU report by stating that assessment of teaching could be conducted in a way that would encourage continuous improvement in teaching. To the best of our knowledge, it is in these two latter reports where we as authors first find mention of the notion of teaching excellence appearing in both administration-driven initiatives and student-led advocacy.

The link between teaching excellence and evaluation of teaching at McMaster has only grown since the 1970s, as demonstrated by institutional policies including the *Policy on the Encouragement of Teaching Excellence* (McMaster University, 2018), which has roots in the similarly titled 1979 *University Policy on the Encouragement of Teaching Excellence by Means of the Evaluation of Teaching*. The link between teaching excellence and evaluation is also demonstrated by the 2019 McMaster University Faculty Association (MUFA) report of the MUFA Ad-Hoc Committee on Student Evaluation of Teaching (Grignon et al., 2019), prompted by years of dissatisfaction from faculty at McMaster and other universities in Ontario on how these evaluations were conducted (*Ryerson University v Ryerson Faculty Association*, 2018). This 2019 MUFA report examined the current approach to and role of student evaluations of teaching and recommended that McMaster engage in an effort to define what teaching excellence means, possibly at the program level, and a more holistic approach to evaluating teaching toward excellence. Over time, the language of teaching excellence has also prominently made its way into public-facing McMaster documentation, including webpages

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geared towards prospective students or a general external audience as noted above. Ultimately, the use of the term “teaching excellence” in these different arenas has kept the phrase afloat over time, woven into institutional culture, and seemingly part of what is understood (or at least reinforced) about McMaster University.

The phrase has clearly had lasting power, but what does teaching excellently entail, exactly? And how is it defined, measured, and rewarded? We have not been able to locate a current definition of teaching excellence in use at McMaster University, and none of the earlier documents we reviewed (cited above) elaborated one either. As such, this chapter seeks to explore the notion of teaching excellence at McMaster as well as how it is evaluated at the university. To that end, we interviewed 20 McMaster administrators, faculty, staff, and students to obtain perspectives from around the university on teaching excellently and assessing teaching excellence. Below, we present our analysis, followed by implications for what these results means for present and future educators at the university.

METHODS

This project was approved by the McMaster Research Ethics Board (Protocol #5263) and all requirements for confidentiality and data protection were taken. Semi-structured virtual interviews 45 to 90 minutes in length were conducted by the first two authors of the research team. We used Zoom-enabled audio recording and transcription and also took notes.

Participants

Through stratified purposeful sampling, we identified 44 individuals to solicit for participation according to our criteria: (a) currently affiliated with McMaster; (b) a member of at least one subgroup: student, staff, faculty member, and/or senior administrator; and (c) is or has been engaged at some level in the work to evaluate and improve teaching and learning at McMaster University. We used directories from each group plus recommendations from associations or unions representing them. We were able to identify individuals across subgroups that represent a diversity of perspectives and experiences, providing an in-depth understanding and facilitating comparison of the stories and insights shared with us (Creswell, 2013; Greene, 2007; Koerber & McMichael, 2008). A total of 20 people participated in the study. As much as possible, the participant pool was balanced so that each of the six faculties, plus the Arts & Science Program, were equally represented. By primary role, the participant pool was comprised of five senior administrators, six faculty members, four staff members, and five students, with time at McMaster ranging from a few years to more than 33. Participants were not explicitly asked about identifying or demographic characteristics.

Data analysis

Each interviewer interacted with 10 of the 20 participants and analyzed the data for their respective 10 interviews. Following the recommended case-study analysis methods as described by Creswell (2012, 2013), the interviewers collected, prepared, read through, and coded the data with the intent to identify common and outlying themes, as well as quotes that may best illustrate a given theme. This entailed immersion in the qualitative data at three

points. First, in the interpretation of participant stories during the interview through the taking of notes (this served the purpose of both immersion and an initial stage of interpretation). Second, in listening to the audio recording while correcting and verifying the digital transcript provided by Zoom. Third, in highlighting transcript and interview portions that may be used for identifying themes and quotes (pre-coding).

The interviewers then engaged in three further levels of interpretation, the first of which entailed synthesizing interview excerpts and notes into the categorization of response patterns or potential themes (i.e., coding). During this synthesis, interviewers engaged in an iterative process of inter-rater reliability checking. The next level of interpretation involved a review and second inter-rater reliability check to come to a definition of themes across the 20 participants by interview question (see Appendix A for the interview questions). According to Creswell (2012), inter-rater reliability can negate bias that an individual may bring to thematic coding. We engaged in the examination of our interpretations by immersing ourselves in the data, synthesizing the data, identifying themes/codes, and comparing for differences and similarities (Creswell, 2012, 2013). Finally, the last level of interpretation involved the entire research team in the form of sharing interviewer thoughts and defined themes with the rest of the team to engage in feedback and the finalization of themes.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

In this section, we report on the most prevalent themes that emerged in response to questions about teaching excellence and assessing teaching excellence.

Defining teaching excellence

When asked whether they were aware of any definitions of teaching excellence at McMaster, all 20 participants said no; however, perspectives on whether a definition exists at McMaster were mixed. Many expressed a certainty that there must be a definition and that if they were to “Google it” they would likely find something either through the teaching excellence website, the MacPherson Institute website, or a McMaster strategic document. In contrast, two administrators replied that there is no single, explicit definition. One of those two administrators shared that a definition was never the goal—that a diversity of approaches and perspectives is a strength and the ideal—while the other stated that teaching excellence is about inclusive teaching and that the ideology of teaching excellence underscores McMaster’s strategic documents. Both noted the goal of student learning as part (but not the whole) of what teaching excellence entails.

The meaning of teaching excellence in the McMaster context

To further explore the notion of teaching excellence at McMaster, participants were asked what teaching excellence means to them within the context of McMaster University. The majority of participants (14/20 or 70%) responded by identifying three overarching factors of teaching excellence at McMaster: (a) how one teaches, (b) context or aspects outside of instructor control, and (c) discipline-specific teaching expertise.

How one teaches

According to participants, the most common factor that defines and has an impact on teaching excellence is how one teaches, or their andragogical² approaches to teaching and learning. In describing teaching excellence related to how one teaches, participants offered a range of examples that reflect four key characteristics of teaching excellence: (a) scholarly teaching, (b) student-centred teaching, (c) reflective teaching, and (d) the mechanics of teaching. Below is a list of the ways participants framed the practice of these characteristics.

A. Scholarly teaching

- Engaging with the scholarship of teaching and learning
- Employing evidence-informed best practices and delivery modes
- Innovating, risk-taking, and testing out new approaches
- Partnering with students and colleagues
- Challenging students
- Fostering retention of learning and application
- Utilizing techniques such as active learning strategies, experiential learning, and problem-based learning
- Facilitating student-community connection

B. Student-centred teaching

- Being mindful of the interaction between what the instructor does and what students do
- Motivating students through information transmission and facilitating deep learning
- Relationship-building and engaging with students beyond the classroom
- Building a shared and holistic learning community
- Communicating and mentoring
- Creating a safe and inclusive learning environment
- Meeting students where they are at
- Encouraging students to think for themselves

C. Reflective teaching

- Committing to continuous improvement of one's teaching views and approaches
- Assessing one's own teaching and students' learning continually and systematically
- Responding to students' needs

D. The mechanics of teaching

- Marking and providing timely feedback
- Preparing course activities and content delivery
- Managing the course

- Being available and maintaining office hours

Context or aspects outside of instructor control and discipline-specific teaching expertise

Two other overarching and contributing factors to teaching excellence were mentioned with less frequency. The factor of context or aspects outside of instructor control includes planning around potential constraints such as the learning environment (physical room or online), scheduling of the class, prioritized program outcomes that dictate what is taught and how, and student characteristics. In relation to the third key factor—discipline-specific teaching expertise—a few participants mentioned that, while it is important to have a base understanding of the course material, teaching excellence goes beyond content delivery and is more about facilitating the learning process for students and helping them.

Interestingly, one participant, a student, broke teaching excellence down into two priorities, teaching excellence for (a) university advancement and (b) student advancement. They explained that how well an educator does in one has little impact on how well they do in another. From this student’s perspective, McMaster’s strength in the priority area of teaching excellence for university advancement was clear, whereas teaching excellence for student advancement was not as consistently evident.

Teaching excellence as a developing concept

Participants were also asked whether their understanding of teaching excellence had changed over time. Fourteen participants indicated that they felt their understanding of teaching excellence had changed over the course of their time with McMaster. For some, the change was related to teaching excellence gaining traction at the institutional level and, for others, it was related to a change in their own views and/or how their teaching practice evolved over time. Of the 14, three emphasized their understanding that teaching excellence is not a “one size fits all” endeavour, while three others discussed the connection between the key characteristics of teaching excellence as contributing to their ability to *feel* whether there was excellence in teaching—either in their own teaching as a faculty member or in the teaching of fellow instructors/faculty under their purview as an administrator.

In contrast, four participants indicated that their understanding of teaching excellence had not changed over time (and two did not respond to the question). Of these, two participants elaborated to say that their understanding of teaching excellence aligned with their department’s advanced practices in teaching excellence from the outset of their time at McMaster, or that McMaster’s evolving culture around teaching had come to underscore elements they had already felt were important.

In our participants’ affirmative responses to the question of whether their understanding of teaching excellence has changed, their insights suggest that perspectives on teaching tend to deepen, expand, or gain nuance over time as one obtains experience as an educator. Interestingly, those who did not retrospectively observe a change in their understanding of teaching excellence appeared to perceive their personally held or work environment’s conceptions around teaching as already progressive. This suggests that change in one’s views about teaching may come as a result of responding to advancing priorities or

new external factors. For the most part, however, participants' understanding of teaching excellence had "gone from tidy perfection to more open ended," as neatly put by one administrator.

Assessing teaching excellence

As the notion of teaching excellence at McMaster was formally linked to some form of assessment of teaching upon approval of the 1979 policy (McMaster University), participants were also asked what they thought was important in assessing teaching and how they assess teaching excellence at McMaster. Three themes emerged from participants' responses to these questions: (a) the use of their own or a colleague's process or metrics, (b) how they use student evaluations of teaching (SET) along with other metrics, and (c) criticisms of current teaching assessments (SET and alternatives to SET). The majority of participants (17/20 or 85%) indicated that they primarily assess either their own teaching or the teaching of others using a process or metrics developed by themselves or a colleague, rather than relying on institutional processes/metrics. Twelve of the 20 participants indicated that they also make some use of the SET data in their overall process of assessing teaching. Perhaps an explanation for why so many respondents utilized their own process for assessing teaching is revealed in that many participants (15/20 or 75%) also expressed concern about the assessment of teaching measures available to them at the institutional level and questioned their validity (including SET, teaching portfolios, and peer observations/evaluations). Furthermore, when asked whether they felt that current practices for assessing teaching at McMaster are aligned with teaching excellence, a majority of participants (13/20 or 65%) replied in the negative.

Recommendations for enhancing assessment of teaching at McMaster

Finally, participants were asked how assessment of teaching excellence could be enhanced at McMaster. Overall, three recommendations emerged: (a) question the value and ways of measuring and assessing teaching; (b) walk the talk by using teaching assessment to ensure accountability to students; and (c) close the loop before, during, and after assessments. Below is a selection of participant quotes that are representative of their overarching concerns and criticisms.

Questioning the value and ways of measuring and assessing teaching

Fifteen (or 75% of) participants made recommendations that questioned existing methods of assessment of teaching or assessment as a whole. One faculty member explored the idea of assessment generally: "Does [assessment] have to be measurable or can it be felt?" This participant explained they are unsure of how to measure teaching excellence, that it is a subjective thing, hard to pin down, and really depends on the needs of the students in their classroom.

Questioning the ways we assess teaching excellence, an administrator commented, "Maybe the really productive thing for students and for the quality of the experience they have in these institutions would be for us to give up on assessment and shift to the formative component." They spoke of how we live in a culture that is preoccupied with measurement and

assessment and felt that formal assessment may restrict creativity in teaching. This administrator suggested that a more formative approach would involve speaking with students and checking in with them—looking for “input” rather than “the answer”—which would be a stronger basis for change and improvement in both learning and teaching.

Another faculty member shared that they knowingly risk not getting positive student feedback (and SET scores) for the benefit of fostering the most effective student learning. To them, the greater focus needs to be on how educators challenge students and facilitate deeper learning—what they referred to as Vygotsky’s alienation moment. This faculty member explained that moment of alienation as learning that happens in the space where a student is struggling to reach that next level of understanding and must go through an uncomfortable feeling of being alienated (or inadequate) in their understanding. In this space, an educator’s role is to make that uncomfortable moment less so while still holding the student accountable for doing the work of learning. The faculty member participant has found that, in creating such a space, students are not satisfied with their teaching, but because deeper learning is so valuable to navigating life outside of the classroom, they persist in this approach at the risk of lower course evaluation scores. As suggested above, this participant does not believe the assessment of teaching and teaching excellence at McMaster are aligned, as achieving one risks failure in the other.

These perspectives signal a need for alternative approaches to assessment to appropriately capture the complex teaching and learning environment.

Walking the talk: Using teaching assessment to ensure accountability to students

Eight (or 40% of) participants made suggestions that spoke to utilizing teaching assessment as a way to ensure accountability to students. One staff member spoke of how some programs at McMaster are known by students to be exclusive, especially for disabled students:

There are just programs which disabled students know not to sign up for which is very sad when you think about it, because it gatekeeps certain equity-seeking students into fields where they know that they can be successful, or you know the opposite of that is where they know that they’re not assured to fail.

They recommended that, while certain programs are currently taking measures to address barriers to students, solutions have to be consistent and systematic and there should be community triaging or a layered approach as part of each program’s practice. Another participant, a student, shared their perspective that McMaster primarily values teaching excellence as it relates to the institution’s reputation for research and innovation. They said, “I know experiences where students have conflict, multiple students have complained about professors, and nothing has come of it.” While this student noted having witnessed instructors weaving their research and innovation strengths into their teaching, dedication to many other aspects of effective teaching seemed lacking, as did follow-through on critical feedback.

These two comments, amongst other similar comments shared by six additional

participants, point towards an opportunity for McMaster's evaluation of teaching processes to be enhanced so that they more effectively serve as part of a comprehensive approach to program or individual accountability to students.

Closing the loop before, during, and after assessments

Finally, nine (or 45% of) participants recommended that more intentional follow-up is needed to successfully drive home insights gleaned from teaching assessment to its various stakeholders. For example, one administrator suggested that McMaster's peer observation process take a more consultative approach to enhance reflection. They thought that the current peer observation process is rather traditional and could be made more meaningful by introducing pre-briefs and debriefs with the instructor, which would encourage reflection on one's pedagogical plans and choices. This administrator also suggested connecting instructors with colleagues and resources as part of the debrief to help facilitate next steps.

This suggestion was echoed by a faculty member's recommendation to have someone review an instructor's evaluative feedback with them. This would help facilitate understanding of the feedback, identify why the instructor received the feedback that they did, develop an action plan for improvement, and then review the action plan at a later interval. The faculty member noted that student feedback would be best placed in this cycle of professional development following the review of the action plan to measure the success of any changes made. Similar to this last point, one student recommended that instructors make a series of efforts to enhance communication, for example, by

checking in with students more often and also being transparent about what teaching excellence actually means, because for me, I wasn't really aware of any definition. So, maybe sharing that with students so that their feedback can better reflect what teaching excellence is.

By establishing a shared understanding of teaching excellence with students, instructors would best set themselves up to receive effective feedback as well as gain student buy-in to the assessment process. These perspectives emphasize the value of teaching development not being approached as a solitary act but as one that engages colleagues and students in the process of continuous improvement.

LIMITATIONS

This study reports on the diverse perspectives and experiences of four distinct but interdependent subgroups of individuals who were a part of the McMaster community at the time of data collection in 2021 and were engaged at some level in the work of evaluating and improving teaching at McMaster. Due to the qualitative nature of the research, the use of purposeful sampling, and our participant selection criteria, this study drew on a small sample size. For the purposes of this qualitative study, a sample size of 20 was sufficient to meet the conditions of the context and informational redundancy across the subgroups, permitting an in-depth case-study analysis and meeting the standard recommended by the research literature of

20–30 cases (Boddy, 2016; Dworkin, 2012; Mason, 2010; Sandelowski, 1995).

While we sought to ensure that those solicited for participation represented a breadth of experiences on the basis of academic area and role at the university, we likely were not able to capture as broad a range of narratives as would be ideal for generalization to other contexts nor to discipline- or faculty-specific differences across the subgroups. Purposeful sampling, combined with our selection criteria, means that many lived experiences in relation to teaching and learning at McMaster have not been included. Additionally, interviews were conducted at one time point. While one data point often limits findings to a snapshot rather than a generalizable trend, those who participated in this study had been engaged at some level in the work of evaluating and improving teaching and learning at McMaster University for more than a year and, in many cases, on an extended or ongoing basis.

It is important to note that, while the research team adopted an active reflexive process over the course of this study (see Holmes, 2020; Patnaik, 2013), we are generally inside members of the culture of power generally identify as highly educated, White, middle to upper-middle class, and cisgender (Cochran-Smith et al., 2015; Mullaly, 2002). The identities of the research team will have had an impact on how we interpreted and acted upon this socially constructed work through the filter of our identities and beliefs, thereby impacting actions and outcomes reported herein (Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2015; Holmes, 2020; Patnaik, 2013; Rust, 1994). The positionality of our research team members in interaction with the positionality of participants during data collection will have impacted what they chose to share with us.

Despite these limitations, this work does represent the views and needs expressed by individuals with experience working to address the evaluation and improvement of teaching at McMaster. Their insights are shared in this chapter, and they contribute to the research literature as well as offer a touchpoint to further reflection on one's own activities in relation to teaching and to engage with these insights in the important work of teaching improvement.

IMPLICATIONS

We offer these implications from our individual perspectives as researchers and authors reflecting on the findings from our study. The results of our study have significant implications for the assessment and valuation of teaching excellence at McMaster. Based on several examples of how the language of teaching excellence was in use in McMaster discourse during the 1970s and remains in use today, as well as what we heard from participants, it appears that a formal definition of teaching excellence does not exist at McMaster University. However, the apparent intentionality of this decision not to define teaching excellence does not appear to be widely understood. While it seems that a number of participants question the need to define teaching excellence and call for alternative approaches to assessment to appropriately capture the complex teaching and learning environment, some of the participants in the student subgroup did see a need for this definition. As such, an opportunity arises for McMaster to resolve this disconnect—to reaffirm and celebrate the diversity of teaching approaches that individually and collectively represent teaching excellence at the institution. Perhaps McMaster needs to broadly define and more explicitly and intentionally support and recognize teaching excellence. In so doing, the university may more clearly signal its vision and support future

initiatives while also acknowledging that teaching excellence can mean many things and that characteristics of teaching excellence can evolve over time, that this is indeed what we are aiming for and celebrate as a teaching and learning community at McMaster. McMaster needs to signal that its commitment to teaching excellence is ongoing and ever evolving so that strategic priorities—such as the publication of *McMaster's Inclusive Teaching and Learning Resource* (McMaster University, 2020) and *Partnered in Teaching and Learning Strategy 2021–2026* (McMaster University, 2021)—clearly reflect the notion of teaching excellence. With respect to expressing the value of teaching at McMaster, resolving this disconnect could potentially go a long way toward clarifying and aligning policy and practice, particularly in light of evidence from this study that, despite the lack of a definition, all of our study participants could describe multiple ways teaching excellence lives in practice at McMaster.

While addressing the (lack of a) definition for teaching excellence seems doable, a greater challenge is the assessment of teaching excellence. The possibility of getting comfortable with not having a definition breaks down when we consider assessment. It would seem to benefit student learning experiences and educators' careers (i.e., evaluating teaching in formal processes, including tenure, permanence, and promotion [McMaster University, 2011, 2018]), to find a way to clearly and fairly assess this undefined thing. Based on recent discourse in the higher education community (Gravestock & Gregor-Greenleaf, 2008; Grignon et al., 2019; Kreitzer & Sweet-Cushman, 2022) as well as our own study participants' perspectives, we know we are not assessing this undefined thing well. At McMaster, inadequate university processes for evaluating teaching have led to consequences, such as students, staff, faculty, or administrators making up their own methods or criteria of assessment of teaching; disagreement between students and instructors with respect to the goals of the learning experience; and instructors risking course evaluation scores for the benefit of challenging students in their learning.

According to our interviews with participants, teaching excellently can be done in many different ways, is nuanced and evolves over time, and is not appropriately assessed by a single score in a course evaluation but is instead best understood as a process. Thus, assessing teaching excellence likely requires a similarly nuanced and process-oriented approach as teaching itself. In Canada, several higher education institutions have begun to articulate what the process of teaching assessment could look like in their institutional contexts (e.g., Simon Fraser University, 2017; University of Saskatchewan, 2017; University of Waterloo, 2019). As summarized neatly in the Simon Fraser University (2017) report, the process of choice for these institutions is to use multiple measurement methods with multiple sources of data over multiple points in time. McMaster can build on current assessment methods that are outlined in policy if not in practice (teaching portfolios, peer evaluations, SET, formative feedback supports offered by the MacPherson Institute, midterm feedback surveys, and faculty mentorship programs) to leverage a multifaceted assessment approach that mirrors those of other Canadian institutions and resolves tensions revealed by this study. As such, we find another disconnect-turned-opportunity for the university: it seems we already have the tools in place at McMaster, the university now just needs to find ways to support various stakeholders at all levels of the institution in making meaningful and consistent use of them.

CONCLUSIONS

In investigating the assessment and valuation of teaching excellence at McMaster, we discovered a decades-old history of the use of the term “teaching excellence” as a means to describe an ideal and achievable practice that is alive at the university in many different ways. We also uncovered tensions in that the university’s position on teaching excellence is not well defined, and our institutional practices to appropriately evaluate teaching excellence in formal processes, including tenure, permanence, and promotion, are not translating from policy to practice. Future directions at McMaster should see the teaching and learning community championing a multifaceted approach to teaching assessment that effectively honours and supports the educators of McMaster in teaching excellently and supporting students well.

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NOTES

1. Instructional Development Centre was the name of McMaster’s teaching and learning centre from 1975–1998—what is now known as the Paul R. MacPherson Institute for Leadership, Innovation and Excellence in Teaching (MacPherson Institute).
2. Andragogy refers to “the theory, methods, and activities involved in teaching adult learners” as defined by the Cambridge University Press (n.d.). For more on the difference between pedagogy (teaching related to children) and andragogy, see Davenport (1987) and Holmes and Abington-Cooper (2000).

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is your role at McMaster University? How long have you been with McMaster?
2. What does *teaching excellence* mean to you within the McMaster context?
 - a. Prompt (as needed): Has your understanding of “teaching excellence” changed since your time with McMaster started? If so, how has it changed?
3. Are you aware of any definitions of *teaching excellence* at McMaster? If so, please reference the source and the definition as best you can.
 - a. Prompt (as needed): Would you say that your understanding of teaching excellence aligns with or differs from McMaster’s definition of teaching excellence? Please explain.
 - b. Prompt (as needed): Could we follow up with you to obtain the definition you’re referencing?
4. Can you think of an example of when you’ve felt that you or an instructor at McMaster has demonstrated teaching excellence?
 - a. Prompt (as needed): What does teaching excellence look like in undergraduate teaching contexts? Graduate teaching contexts? Please feel free to provide new/additional examples.
 - b. Prompt (as needed): Can you elaborate on the teaching excellence you’ve witnessed or demonstrated at either the graduate or undergraduate levels as it relates to: student experience, EDI, instructional enhancement, or other priorities in teaching and learning? You can refer to the same example(s) you already noted or additional one(s).
5. What do you think is important when assessing teaching?
 - a. Prompt (as needed): Has your understanding of what’s important when assessing teaching changed since your time with McMaster started? If so, how has it changed?
6. How do you assess teaching at McMaster? You can refer to assessing your own teaching and/or assessing someone else’s teaching.
 - a. Prompt (as needed): Can you elaborate on what assessment of teaching practices you’ve witnessed or demonstrated as it relates to student experience, EDI, instructional enhancement, or other priorities in teaching and learning?
7. Are current practices for assessing teaching at McMaster aligned with teaching excellence? Please explain your answer.
8. How could assessment of teaching excellence be enhanced at McMaster?
9. Is there anything else you would like to add?