

The University Senate Departmental Award for Excellence in Education

A Proposal by the AU Teaching Effectiveness Committee

Executive Summary

The Auburn University Teaching Effectiveness Committee proposes to establish with funding initially provided by Office of the Vice President, the **University Senate Departmental Award for Excellence in Education** to recognize one AU department annually for their efforts to develop teaching excellence and to create an enriched learning environment for all of its students. While current programs recognize outstanding individual college teachers; the proposed **University Senate Departmental Award for Excellence in Education** award will recognize an academic department for their exceptional commitment to quality education and will provide funding for a three-year period during which the honored department will initiate faculty development activities to enhance the continued development of effective practices in teaching and learning. The **University Senate Departmental Award for Excellence in Education** will have significant impact on departmental culture, not just individual behavior, by recognizing the collective performance within an academic unit, and by supporting additional activities targeted to further enhance departmental quality of faculty performance and student learning. This proposed award is consistent with Priority 1 of the 2008 AU Strategic Plan for Elevating Academics which states: “The Auburn University System will elevate undergraduate education and enrich the undergraduate experience.”

Rationale

Adding recognition of a whole department for excellent teaching is advantageous in several ways. A departmental award program can bring unity of purpose by enabling a greater number of faculty members to receive recognition for their efforts around a common purpose. It creates incentive for even the best faculty within a department to improve their teaching. It provides the opportunity for life-long learning, a goal of the 21st century, and encourages continued development for faculty as well as students. It helps departments strive for excellence through progress and change. A departmental award can positively impact a departmental culture so that teaching excellence becomes part of the department’s identity and “brand”. Recognition of this nature can be an excellent tool to recruit students and faculty and to support the department’s efforts to publicize its teaching expertise to parents, legislators, accrediting boards, and internal and external granting agencies. In fact, unique models and innovations offer opportunity for collaborative proposals to secure extramural funding.

Furthermore, an individual teaching award often seems out of their grasp to many faculty members who are good at teaching. The proposed **University Senate Departmental Award for Excellence in Education** provides a structure for both recognizing teaching excellence and for future teaching and learning improvement efforts. It thereby provides an incentive for teaching enhancement that is greater than an individual award-only program. The award

becomes a shared community honor and represents an attainable goal achieved through intentionality and planning instead of a chance occurrence that happens individually to others.

Finally, awarding improvement may encourage faculty to develop their teaching earlier in their career than if they start focusing on teaching in hopes of an award at mid-career or as they near retirement. Consequently, their efforts to improve teaching will result in an improved learning situation for a greater number of AU students. This type of award structure may lead faculty to make more long-term commitments to one's department and to AU. The **University Senate Departmental Award for Excellence in Education** will have long lasting impact and will "institutionalize" teaching excellence by creating a departmental identity, entity and structure that the university can maintain and nourish.

The **University Senate Departmental Award for Excellence in Education** will entertain applications from any academic department. The **University Senate Departmental Award for Excellence in Education** will create a continual conversation about teaching excellence in every department. As a result of the application process, departments will engage in in-depth analysis and reflection of their instructional objectives and outcomes. In this way, the award will create a campus-wide community of reflective practitioners, engaged in the *assessment* of student learning outcomes and effective teaching, and innovative thinking directed at the improvement of teaching and learning.

Award Specifics

The **University Senate Departmental Award for Excellence in Education** will be awarded to one academic department at Auburn University. The award will provide:

- A plaque describing the award to be displayed in the academic department's office
- A plaque describing the award to be displayed at the Biggio Center.
- An award of \$30,000 to be granted in three yearly installments of \$10,000
 - At least 50% of the funds must be allocated toward the support of activities that enhance teaching and learning within the department (see description of the three-year development plan below for suggestions)
 - The remaining funding can be used at the department's discretion
- A public recognition activity where all members of the campus community will be invited to participate
- Appropriate press releases will be made in the local media

Funding Strategy

The funding model for the **University Senate Departmental Award for Excellence in Education** award is based on initial funding from the VP/Provost office as redirection of savings resulting from the switch to electronic course evaluation from use of hard copy paper forms. In the third and subsequent years, assuming an award is made annually, there would

be a need for \$30,000 each year to sustain the program. Therefore, the funding request would be as follows:

| <u>Award Cycle</u> | <u>Year 1</u> | <u>Year 2</u> | <u>Year 3</u> | <u>Year 4</u> |
|------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| 1 st Department Awardee | \$10,000 | \$10,000 | \$10,000 | \$ 0 |
| 2 nd Depart. Awardee | NA | \$10,000 | \$10,000 | \$10,000 |
| 3 rd Depart. Awardee | | NA | \$10,000 | \$10,000 |
| 4 th Depart. Awardee | | | NA | \$10,000 |
| Totals | \$10,000 | \$20,000 | \$30,000 | \$30,000 |

We anticipate the Senate leadership would meet with Development Officers to explore endowment shell agreements resulting in a named award (therefore, the award name could be modified with input from the donor and the Teaching Effectiveness Committee). Consequently, the one-time request to the Provost Office is for funding at \$30,000 to support one award over three years. This will enable the award program to be launched in a timely fashion while simultaneously seeking a donor for sustainability.

Award Administration

The Biggio Center will receive the funds, establish and provide oversight for the management of the overall accounts and internal transfer distribution of funds to the department.

Selection Criteria

All academic departments at Auburn University are eligible to apply but submissions are limited to one from each college/school per year. Prior award winning departments must wait 5 years before they can apply again. Each application must include a signed letter of support from the Dean and the nominated department’s chair. Selection will be based on: 1) a full description of the department’s efforts to improve teaching and learning, 2) evidence of teaching excellence showing the relationship between teaching and improved student learning, and 3) a professional development plan (with budget of the award funds) that outlines three years of proposed teaching and learning enhancement activities. Nominations are due to the chair of Teaching Effectiveness Committee (TEC charged to evaluate and select the award) via the Biggio Center (charged to be administrator of the award) by November 15 and the award recipient will be announced in late February-early March.

The department’s thorough description of teaching excellence should include (but not be limited to) the following material dating back no longer than five (5) years:

Overview of teaching effort and priority within the Department:

- A statement of departmental teaching philosophy
- A copy of the department’s mission or strategic plan with a special focus on teaching and student learning outcomes
- A statement of teaching and learning goals for the next 3 years

Supportive documentation of overall curriculum and teaching program:

- A statement of teaching responsibilities within the department (with evidence that teaching expertise and experience are factored into teaching assignments)
- A description of the prevailing teaching methodologies for introductory and advanced courses (demonstrating appropriate use of lecture as well as interactive, student-centered, and technology-supported pedagogies)
- A few representative course syllabi detailing course content and objectives, teaching methods, readings, assignments, student grading procedures
- A list of advising responsibilities, such as number of undergraduate advisees, direction/supervision of honors projects, or graduate theses and dissertations
- Descriptions of curricular revisions efforts, including new course projects, materials, class assignments, or other activities

Documents in support of efforts to enhance teaching and learning:

- Documentation of participation in individual, Biggio Center, departmental, or national teaching or faculty development activities
- Narrative of innovation and efforts to stay current and advance

Evidences of scholarly works by the department:

- A list of contributions to educational research and publication
- Lists of grantsmanship and extramural support attempts for teaching
- A list of examples of interdisciplinary collaboration (note: interdisciplinarity may be a value point if departments are engaging collaboratively but the award is not meant to drive that process per se.)

Documentation of Recognitions and Achievements:

- A list of teaching honors received by departmental faculty
- Overall summary of student evaluation of teaching
- Summary of peer review of teaching reports
- A list of invitations from outside agencies to teach or present on teaching issues
- Evidence of professional presentations at teaching related conferences or workshops
- A list of invitations to other educational institutions to demonstrate effective teaching or to participate in teaching/learning symposia
- Evidence of student learning
- Examples of faculty teaching portfolios
- Examples of student portfolios including examples of student work, pre- and post-test results, etc., that demonstrate student learning in the department's courses

The above are not meant to serve as a rigid set of criteria or expected metrics as this may favor conformity at the expense of creativity and innovation. Evidence of teaching excellence should include standard objective metrics that are collected on all departments (e.g. *assessment* information, course evaluations, etc.). There are metrics that individual departments may do to go above and beyond the norm. A specific evaluation guide will be developed by the Biggio Center and the Teaching Effectiveness Committee for the selection process to assist all departments that undergo the evaluation.

The department's three-year professional development plan should describe 36 months of teaching enhancement activities. The three-year development plan will serve as an agreement between the department and the Biggio Center whereby the department promises to achieve the elements of the plan with Biggio monitoring progress. The Biggio Center will assist the winning department to develop a budget and to finalize and fully implement the development plan as appropriate. Activities might include, but are not limited to:

- Regular departmental teaching retreats, seminars, colloquia, and workshops
- Purchase of books, periodicals, software, and materials relating to teaching and learning
- Individual Academic Portfolios documenting teaching, research, and service expertise
- *Assessments* of learning beyond AUEvaluate reports
- Early feedback and midterm course evaluations for courses taught during the award period
- Peer review of teaching with consultation and feedback
- Classroom observation that may include videotape recording
- Attendance at other disciplinary, regional, national, or international conferences on college teaching
- Participation in national initiatives such as the Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, NSF teaching or curricular development initiatives
- Support action research investigating the process of teaching and learning outcomes
- Support to attend conferences to present research on teaching or innovative teaching approaches
- Creation of innovative teaching approaches
- Creation of course websites and the use of distributed and distance education
- Development of faculty mentoring programs
- Creation of teaching development programs (courses, practica, seminars, PFF, orientations) for graduate and undergraduate TAs and Graduate Instructors

Reporting Requirement

The department selected for this award must submit an annual report (due June 30) to the Biggio Center describing its activities for the preceding year and their impact upon faculty and student performance. The annual report will be shared with the Teaching Effectiveness Committee.

Proposed Calendar

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| Spring 2013 | Announce, begin educating and promoting |
| September 1 201X | Application material distributed and posted on web sites |
| November 1 201X | Applications due to the Biggio Center |
| December 1 201X | Selection date |
| Jan (First week of spring Semester) | Recognition Activity & Funding begins |
| Dec 31 (3 years later) | Funding ends |