

Selecting and Rewarding Best Teachers in U.S. Schools of Pharmacy

Mickey C. Smith

How should we define good teaching? How do we recognize it? How should it be rewarded? In the garden of pharmacy education questions, these are perennials.

The purpose of this report is not to answer these difficult questions. Rather, it is to relate what some U.S. schools of pharmacy are now doing to identify and reward excellence in teaching in one way—selection of a Teacher of the Year.

In October, 1991 letters were sent to the deans of each of the 75 schools. A request was made to supply “criteria and/or procedure . . . used . . . to select persons for teaching awards.” The hope was expressed that an entire issue of this *Journal* might be devoted to this subject. (That hope still exists but the materials received in response to *this* request did not lend themselves to such a venture.)

A total of 47 schools responded to the request. Four (Chicago, Ferris State, Michigan, Nebraska) indicated that they do not currently have such an award. Three schools (Arkansas, Northeastern, Tennessee) participate in a campus-wide program but have no pharmacy-specific award. (Some schools who *do* have an internal award also have campus-wide programs, but these are not included here.) It is not known whether the 28 non-respondents have “best teacher” awards.

It was decided to identify respondents by name in the materials which follow. Readers may wish to contact colleagues for further details.

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HOW TEACHERS ARE SELECTED

Most schools use some sort of student voting procedure to select the teacher to be honored. There is considerable variation, however, as the contents of Table 1 show.

Where entries appear in the "Criteria" column of Table 1, they are either direct quotes extracted from printed guidelines or respondent letters or summaries by me from the same sources. Absence of criteria/comments from other schools indicate only that none were sent and not necessarily that none are used.

As the reader will see, many schools limit voting to the senior class. Several schools have two or more awards. Some have detailed voting procedures (Medical University of South Carolina) and in one school (Oregon State) students must "buy" their votes.

Table 2 includes responses from schools who indicated that students alone do not choose the teacher to be selected. Even here, five of the eleven schools use students in the selection process and one supposes that informal student input is a factor at all schools.

NATURE OF THE AWARD

The letter sent to the deans did not specifically request information concerning the nature of the award. As a consequence, the information in Table 3 should not be considered representative. One must presume, for example, that every award must include some sort of plaque or certificate.

CONCLUSION

This has been a first attempt at a comprehensive report on the nature of "best teacher" awards in U.S. schools of pharmacy. Reader response is encouraged and, if the response is sufficient to suggest continued interest, an effort will be made to publish a more comprehensive report in the future.

One final comment.

It is considered a near requirement in any discussion of student

TABLE 1. Schools Using Student Voting Procedures

School	Procedure	Criteria/Other Comments
Illinois	<p>"Golden Apple Award" – vote of student body</p> <p>"Teacher of the Year Award" One per professional class/vote of that class</p>	". . . criteria may be boiled down to popularity"
Medical University of South Carolina	Weighed vote by student body (5th yr. counts 3, 4th yr. counts 2, 3rd yr. counts 1)	"Organized, helpful to students, interested in students mastering the material"
Pittsburgh	Vote of senior class	"The class sets the criteria"
Southern California	Four awards, one for each class, by student vote	"[Students] take into consideration such issues as mastery of subject, well organized, actively helpful to all students, motivated and with good communication skills"

TABLE 1 (continued)

School	Procedure	Criteria/Other Comments
Kentucky	Vote of senior class	". . . demonstrated genuine leadership, true professionalism, a sincere interest in students and the ability to communicate to and with students"
West Virginia	Three awards, by student vote in each professional year.	Detailed listing in five categories: Knowledge, Class Presentation, Student Relations, Enthusiasm, Quality of Exams
Albany	Committee of students will review first-round voting by student body and return two or fewer names for a second ballot.	Effective instruction, student rapport, teaching-related activities
Montana	Vote of student body	Innovative style, makes material understandable and explain usefulness, instills desire for life-long self learning and professional enthusiasm
Buffalo	Administered by Rho Chi, vote of graduating class	Enthusiasm for topic, presentation skills, quality of material, current research included, encourages professional ethics/standards

TABLE 1 (continued)

School	Procedure	Criteria/Other Comments
Duquesne	Vote of graduating class	Rated on a list of 19 criteria
North Carolina	Vote of graduating class	Presentation, interest in students, fair/relevant exams, contribution to student's education
Oregon State	Vote of junior and senior classes, two awards	Students "buy" their votes with money going to purchase plaque
North Dakota	Vote of entire student body	
Southwestern Oklahoma State	Two awards: pharmaceutical sciences and clinical pharmacy. Senior class vote	
Maryland	Senior class vote for Best Teacher (see also Table 2)	
New Mexico	Vote by 3rd and 4th year students	
Mississippi	Vote of senior class	
Auburn	Vote of student body	
Kansas	Vote of Rho Chi Student Members	
Rhode Island	Vote of senior class	

TABLE 1 (continued)

School	Procedure	Criteria/Other Comments
Washington State	Two awards: Pharmacy Practice and Pharmaceutical Sciences. Vote of student body	
Toledo	Vote of 4th year class at end of that year	
Mercer	Two awards: one for teaching, one for service. Senior class votes, using 10 points for 1st choice, 9 points for 2nd, etc.	
Idaho State	Chosen from among nominees by a committee of Pharmacy Student Senate	
Connecticut	Three awards by vote of three professional classes	
Ohio State	Vote of graduating class	
Cincinnati	Vote (?) of Rho Chi members	
California State	Student vote in each of four classes	
Drake	Vote of student body following preliminary ballots in respective classes	

TABLE 2. Miscellaneous Selection Procedures

School	Procedure	Criteria/Other Comments
Northeast Louisiana	Selection committee composed of faculty	Classroom technique, influence on students, reputation among students, peers
St. Louis	Faculty selection committee	Commitment to students, college mission and to educational excellence (more detail provided)
South Carolina	Committee of Dean and current and immediate past student class officers	Criteria included on classroom evaluation forms
Pacific	Student rating forms (ballots) tabulated by screening committee consisting of three previous winners. Dean selects from list of three numerically-ranked candidates.	Course content, presentation style, exam quality, interest and concern for students
Creighton	Dossiers of nominees reviewed by Executive Committee and rated. Winner chosen based on group ratings.	Three pages of specifics

TABLE 2 (continued)

School	Procedure	Criteria/Other Comments
Virginia	Ad Hoc Award Committee selects	List of specifics on excellence in teaching and in promoting the teaching mission of the school
Florida	Selection committee of at least one-fourth students recommend nominee to the dean.	Excellence as demonstrated by student evaluation and peer observations, evidence of innovation.
Utah	Final decision by dean following recommendations by designated faculty and student committees working together.	Mastery of subject, concern for students, inspirational, creative teaching skills, demands on student and impact on students.
South Dakota	Selected by Dean	
Georgia	Committee consisting of three students and members of the Faculty Affairs Committee chooses from among nominees.	
Maryland	Faculty vote on nominees.	

TABLE 3. Types of Awards Given to Teacher of the Year

<u>Type of Award</u>	<u>Number of Schools Responding*</u>
Cash Award	
\$500	3
\$800	1
\$1,000	6
\$2,500	2
Unspecified	2
Travel	
To AACP Meeting	4
Plaque/certificate	14
Recognition at School Function	10

*Multiple responses from some schools, no indication from others

evaluation of teaching to minimize it as an effective method. "It's just a popularity contest," is the most frequent criticism. Certainly there must be *some* truth in this, but if students are furnished with some real evaluative criteria (and if they use them), their opinions (votes) should be carefully considered. Even without such criteria, student evaluations have value. To alter a phrase, "They don't know much about teaching, but they know what they like." Would we pay more attention to students if they voted on *Worst Teachers*?