

Utah State University
Human Development and Family Studies
Peer Evaluation of Teaching

The varied purposes and scopes of evaluating peer teaching determine the approach we should take in planning, executing, and debriefing the observation experience. At some point, most of us will be asked to provide feedback to colleagues who are preparing documentation for promotion and rank advancement. There is merit to using a standardized approach for this process. Additionally, we may be asked to provide feedback to assist a teacher who is struggling, to provide support documentation for someone who has been nominated for an award, or give assistance to someone who just wants to make some improvements in her/his teaching. Therefore, there is also merit to having some flexibility in observational approaches. As a guiding principle, we would hope that, regardless of the stated reason for the observation, an underlying and genuine desire to help colleagues enhance their teaching anchors the process. In this document we outline the three most common components of a comprehensive peer evaluation process, which include a pre-assessment, the class observation, and a collegial debriefing. Because each observation is unique, and reasons for the observations vary, we have tried to include diverse approaches to each step in hopes that faculty can find strategies that fit the situation and their philosophy best. All, or some, of the documentation contained in this file may be helpful as evaluators and teachers work together to decide on an appropriate observation strategy.

Observation Intangibles

Doing peer evaluations of teaching can be a time-consuming and sometimes even frustrating process in the context of an already over-full schedule. On the other hand, it is valuable university service, so we commend you for your contributions to the academy. We think you might find the peer evaluation process less frustrating if you keep a few suggestions in mind.

1. Our peer observations are simply a snapshot at one point in time. It could be that the day of the observation is anomalous to the *average* class. So do not stress or perseverate, just report what you see.
2. You can alleviate a lot of personal stress as a peer evaluator if you remember that the teaching style you are observing is likely not the same as your own. Most of us teach in a certain way because we are attached to that style and may even feel it is the *best* style. Don't worry about how closely your peer's style aligns with your own but rather focus on the overall effectiveness of the lesson and the engagement of the students.
3. Teaching style and student reaction to style often vary by professor's age, gender, and ethnicity. You will feel less stress as a peer evaluator if you keep in mind the degrees of freedom separating your characteristics and background from that of the peer you are observing.
4. You have likely learned through your own teaching that classes have their own personality and tone. If your observation occurs later in the semester, your colleague has likely learned to adjust teaching style, pace, and classroom management to the personality of the class. What you see this semester may not be what you will see next semester.
5. Similar to the points above, some professors adopt an informal style and use extensive classroom activities while others adopt a more formal lecture style. It will create less stress for you as the evaluator if you focus more on student learning and engagement and less on specific teaching technique.
6. If you sense a lot of student anxiety in the class it may have very little to do with your peer's teaching style and more to do with the size of the class, the content of the class, or the stakes involved. The stakes are high in content classes like statistics, research methods, and large entry-level pre-med classes; ergo, the student anxiety you sense likely has very little to do with your peer's classroom style and much more to do with students' preparation levels.
7. Keep in mind the differences associated with teaching online or broadcast to the traditional face-to-face teaching experience. Instructors broadcasting to remote sites typically have less control over in-class environments and interactive communication is often hampered to an extent by satellite delays.

Suggestions for Peer Review Pre-Class Visit

Prior to the class observation, it is a good idea to meet together to discuss the purpose and scope of the observation experience. This meeting can range from formal to informal. Proximity in time to the observation experience is important, generally no more than a week prior but not immediately before. In this meeting, the following items can be addressed (NOTE: This is a rather lengthy list of items, it might be in your best interest to consider only a few of these at a time).

1. Discuss the Processes Related to Peer Evaluation
 - a. Is this a one-time observation, or longitudinal? If longitudinal, how long, and how often?
 - b. What does the faculty member want the evaluator to assess?
 - i. How does this tie into section 3 below?
 - c. Will the faculty member and evaluator discuss observations after the classroom observation?
 - i. When?
 - ii. Where?
 - d. The date for completion of the official peer-evaluation letter (if any).
2. Discuss and Understand the Class
 - a. Why does the faculty member teach the class the way they do?
 - b. How has the class evolved over time?
 - c. Are there any unique or extenuating circumstances surrounding this particular class?
3. Discuss and agree on what sources of evidence will be used to assess teaching performance. Possible considerations include the following:
 - a. Content Knowledge
 - i. Examination of syllabus
 - ii. Examination of course materials and tests
 - iii. Classroom observations
 - iv. Scholarly record
 - b. Organization and Pacing
 - i. Examination of goals and objectives
 - ii. Review of pacing practices
 - c. Teaching Methods
 - i. Classroom observations of variety
 - ii. Evidence of impact
 - d. Presentation/Self-of-Instructor
 - i. Personal aspects
 - ii. Ways of connecting
 - iii. Use of examples and humor
 - iv. Use of technology
 - e. Process: Interactions
 - i. Questioning

- ii. Discussions
 - iii. Responsiveness and understanding
- f. Student Engagement
 - i. Interest level this semester
 - ii. Participation norms
- g. Assessment Methods
 - i. Tests or performance tasks
 - ii. Comments on graded work
 - iii. Student ratings scores on assessment items

Suggestions for Peer Review Classroom Visits

Class observations can be done many different ways. Here are three versions of the most popular approaches. The first two (NOTE: These are the same form, just different reporting formats) take a more holistic approach to classroom observation. In this fashion, the observer looks for major themes as the teaching process unfolds, highlighting evidences of teaching strength and areas where development is warranted. The third one takes a more quantitative approach such that the observer provides a score for each observational category.

HDFS Peer Faculty Observation Form (Option A₁)

Comment on the following areas. Include areas of strength and areas for development.

Content Knowledge [e.g., fit with course description, current, balance, etc.]

Organization & Pacing [e.g., clear goals, well-paced]

Teaching Methods [e.g., variety, impact]

Presentation/Self-of-Instructor [e.g., personal aspects, ways of connecting, examples, humor]

Process; Interactions [e.g., questions, discussion, responsiveness, understanding]

Student Engagement [e.g., interest, participation]

Assessment Methods [e.g., feedback, iClicker, knowledge probes, ‘muddiest point’ questions]

HDFS Peer Faculty Observation Form (Option A₂)

Areas of Strength	Areas for Development
Content knowledge [e.g., fit with course description, current, balance, etc.]	
Organization & Pacing [e.g., clear goals, well-paced]	
Teaching Methods [e.g., variety, impact]	
Presentation/Self-of-Instructor [e.g., personal aspects, ways of connecting, examples, humor]	
Process; Teacher-Student Interactions [e.g., questions, discussion, responsiveness, understanding]	
Student Engagement [e.g., interest, participation]	
Assessment Methods [e.g., feedback, iClicker, knowledge probes, 'muddiest point' questions]	

HDFS Peer Faculty Observation Form (Option B)

For the following prompts, please assign numbers based on the scale below:

5=Excellent

4=Above Average or Approaching Standards of Excellence

3=Meets Expectations of Normative Standards of Effectiveness

2=Below Average of Expected Norms for Effectiveness

NA=Not Applicable or relevant to this type of course

NO=Applicable to this course but Not Observed during this session

Ability to communicate:

- ☐ Speaks clearly and understandably
- ☐ Uses humor effectively
- ☐ Good pacing in class
- ☐ Uses pedagogical “markers” to help students to understand where they are in the lecture; (gives an outline, checks off important concepts).
- ☐ Organized

Develops Rapport with Students:

- ☐ Prevents students from dominating the discussion
- ☐ Maintains order in class
- ☐ Good grasp on student’s level of understanding and pace
- ☐ Creates an appropriate psychological environment for learning (safe to explore ideas)
- ☐ Is gender, class, or ethnically neutral when calling on students, answering questions, and explaining material
- ☐ Keeps students engaged

Supports cognitive skills and learning processes

- ☐ Uses learning objectives in designing effective experiences
- ☐ Assists student's reasoning skills (e.g. Bloom's taxonomy)
- ☐ Helps students expand their comments, making links, and devising applications
- ☐ Provides time in class for practice
- ☐ Incorporates current research in the field
- ☐ Instructor links new material to previously learned concepts
- ☐ Instructor uses good examples to explain the concept

Affective traits/skills

- ☐ Is demanding but fair, ethical and honest
- ☐ Is comfortable admitting ignorance
- ☐ Conveys enthusiasm

Three things the instructor did VERY well.

1

2

3

Three things for future consideration.

1

2

3

Responding to Peer Evaluation Feedback

Even though most instructors enjoy getting a glowing evaluation, for assessment purposes, an evaluation with specific points for improvement is more helpful. In addition to the expectation to have systematic and repeated peer evaluations, most role statements include a phrase about documenting any changes made based on those evaluations. Therefore, a candidate needs to have written feedback on suggestions for improvement in order to document how he or she responded to the feedback. This section will provide suggestions on how to respond to recommendations and document improvements.

An effective place to start with this process is in a meeting before the observation takes place (see ideas for **Pre-Class Visit** earlier in this document). The faculty member being evaluated can ask the observing colleague to look for specific areas of possible improvement. This will increase the likelihood that the instructor will have feedback that can be addressed.

Ideally, after the observation, the faculty member being observed and the colleague observing will meet again to discuss the evaluation. This will provide the observer a chance to explain suggestions for improvement and possibly discuss with the instructor ideas about how to implement those changes.

If changes are going to be made, it is important to document the changes and any outcomes from the changes. For example, the observer may give feedback on how to make instructions for an assignment clearer for students. First, the faculty member could document the instructions before being observed and then document how the instructions were changed. After making a change, the faculty member could document the difference in scores on that specific assignment or the number of students that came to office hours for help on the assignment.

Sometimes an instructor has an explanation on the feedback given. For example, an instructor may receive the feedback that a group activity might be more effective than lecturing about a certain topic. The instructor may be able to explain that he or she tried doing a group activity on that topic but learned that the students did not have the basic concepts at that time to gain the benefit from the group activity. The instructor could document the explanation of that particular feedback. Some outcomes may show up quickly and others will take time to gather, such as student evaluation scores.

In summary, the instructor can follow these steps for responding to feedback:

- Meet with the observer before the observation takes place and ask the observer to look for specific areas of improvement (the instructor can control the narrative).
- Meet with the observer after the observation to discuss possible ways to improve the course.
- Document any changes made along with any outcomes observed or document an explanation of why changes were not made.

Syllabus Review Form

Instructions

Below is a list of items commonly found on an academic syllabus. The list is not exhaustive, so feel free to add things as you see fit. For each item indicate how clearly it is presented. Also include constructive comments to the instructor for these items.

Syllabus Component	Evidence	Comments
	1 (not evident) - 5 (evident) or N/A	
Course Information		
Instructor Name and Title		
Contact Information		
Office Hours		
Teaching Assistant Information		
Course Description		
Course Objectives		
Align with IDEA		
Course Prerequisites		
Textbook and Reading Requirements		
Evaluation Methods		
Assignment Descriptions		
Grading Scale/Rubrics		
Policies		
Late Assignments		
Attendance		
Academic Integrity		

Syllabus Component	Evidence (1-5)	Comments
Student Comportment		
Withdraws and Incompletes		
Students with Disabilities		
Diversity		
Grievance Process		
Emergency Preparedness		
Course Outline/Schedule		
Overall Syllabus Clarity		
Outcomes Match Assignments		
Clear Evaluation and Grading Expectations		
Course Work Appropriate to Academic Level of Course		
Reading Assignments Appropriate to Academic Level of Course		
Assignments Challenging and Appropriate to Academic Level of Course		
Number of Assignments Appropriate		
Number of Out of Class Hours Appropriate		

References

- Arreola, R. A. (2007). *Developing a comprehensive faculty evaluation system: A guide to designing, building, and operating large-scale faculty evaluation systems* (3rd Ed). San Francisco, CA: Anker Publishing.
- Bandy, J. (2017). *Peer review of teaching*. Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching. Retrieved from <https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/peer-review-of-teaching/>
- Chism, N. (2007). *Peer review of teaching: A sourcebook* (2nd Ed.). Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing.