Temple University
Center for the Advancement of Teaching

Peer Review of Teaching

Observation Instrument for In-Person Classes

Why Peer Review[1]?

Teaching should be evaluated using the same high standards we employ for research-based scholarly activity, which is a peer-reviewed activity. Just as peer review of our scholarly activity ensures quality and provides valuable feedback to continually improve our work, quality peer review of teaching is a powerful way of providing feedback on teaching effectiveness in order to engage faculty in a continual reflective practice that improves teaching. However, the benefits of peer review accrue to more than just the instructor. For reviewers, it affords the opportunity to see how their peers are approaching teaching and learning which may provide new insights into their own teaching. For departments, the benefits include the possibility of developing a more open and sharing culture around teaching, as well as a secondary measure beyond student feedback for evaluating teaching.

This Peer Review Guide provides space for the peer reviewer to note their observations on an instructor's teaching in the 5 key areas provided in this document. Following those five areas there is a page where you can identify strengths and areas of improvement to discuss with the instructor. We recommend identifying 3 key strengths and 3 key areas of improvement so as not to overwhelm the instructor with feedback. We invite you to tailor this instrument to the specific needs of your department.

Recommended Peer Review Process

A robust peer review process includes the following steps:

Step 1: Arrange a pre-observation meeting. In this meeting, the instructor who will be reviewed will have the opportunity to:

- Share information about the class that will be reviewed, including the goals or key concepts of the class session, preparatory work students will be doing, and what students' prior knowledge on the day's subject is.
- Request that you pay particular attention to any issues or concerns they're experiencing or new teaching activities for which they would like feedback.
- Review this observation instrument and ask any clarifying questions.

Step 2: Conduct the observation using the attached instrument. Attend on a day that reflects the instructor's typical teaching style. We recommend choosing a seat that will enable you to see both the instructor's and the students' nonverbal expressions. After the observation, re-read your observation notes in all 5 categories and decide on three areas of strength and three areas for improvement that you feel are most useful to discuss with the faculty member.

Step 3: Arrange a post-observation meeting to provide feedback. The feedback should address both strengths and areas for improvement.

Instructor: _____ **Course:** _____ **Date:** _____

Learning happens best when there is a positive climate in the classroom.

The climate that you create in your classroom can affect students' intellectual, emotional and social development, including their sense of belonging, and thus has the power to hinder or energize learning.The sum of our verbal and non-verbal behaviors creates this climate, and thus being attuned to these behaviors and how they may affect your students is key.

Examples of evidence to look for:

- Encourages and fosters a healthy exchange of ideas and sharing of experiences among course participants
- Encourages students to share their questions, examples, and experiences
- Attends respectfully to student questions and ideas
- Treats students as individuals, e.g., addresses students by name
- Intentionally finds ways to connect with students
- Incorporates student ideas into the class
- Pauses after asking questions
- Uses gestures, movements, facial expressions and other physical responses that are friendly and accessible
- Encourages students to seek assistance with course content and learning activities if needed
- Turns discord and tension into a learning opportunity
- Makes uncertainty safe by valuing different viewpoints

Resources:

- Creating Community
- Shaping a Positive Learning Environment
- Six Ways to Promote a Positive Learning Environment
- Humanizing the Large Lecture: Why It's Important and How to Start
- Building Relationships With Students
- Classroom Climate and Sense of Belonging

Observations:

Learning happens best when students have opportunities for reciprocity and collaboration.

Learning is enhanced when it is more like a team effort than a solo race. Good learning is collaborative and social, not individually competitive and isolated. Working with others often increases engagement in learning. Sharing one's own ideas and listening to divergent ideas from others sharpens thinking and deepens understanding, and enhances creative approaches to problems. It also provides important skills that students will need beyond the classroom.

Examples of evidence to look for:

- Provides regular opportunities for students to engage in formal and/or informal discussions of course topics and collaborative learning activities.
- Provides prompts that help to guide groups towards inclusive and productive discussion
- Guides the direction of discussions, encouraging participation and mediating conflict orroadblocks
- Provides space for all students to participate actively and have their voices heard
- Implements group activities so that they follow the basic tenets of cooperative learning (see Resources, below) in order to avoid the common pitfalls of "group work" and set up the activity for successful learning
- Draws non-participating students into activities and discussions

Resources:

- What is Cooperative Learning?
- Teaching with Discussions
- Discussions
- Group & Collaborative Learning: Students as Classroom Leaders
- Collaborative Learning

Observations:

Learning happens best when students are engaged in active learning that allows for practice and feedback, self-assessement, and reflection.

Active learning methods engage students in the learning process by encouraging them to discover, process, evaluate, and apply information. It also allows for opportunities to reflect on learning, to self-assess competence and gaps in learning, and receive meaningful feedback on learning from the instructor and/or from other students in real time. Empirical support for the positive impact of active learning on student achievement is extensive [2].

Examples of evidence to look for:

- Actively uses student writing, speaking, and other forms of self-expression
- Incorporates student work involving information gathering, synthesis, and analysis
- Provides opportunities to reflect on their learning through thinking, talking, or writing exercises
- Uses research, lab or studio work, or physical activities
- Uses technologies to engage students in active learning (e.g. polling software, back-channel communication tools, collaborative software, etc.)
- Uses educational games and simulations
- Facilitates class discussions by encouraging, probing, questioning, summarizing, etc.
- Engages students in thoughtfully-designed peer review activities

Resources:

- Engagement Activities
- Inquiry-based Learning
- Active Learning
- Active Learning Techniques
- Classroom Assessment Techniques
- Flipping the Classroom
- Making the Most of Classroom Polling
- Wise Feedback: Using Constructive Feedback to Motivate Learners
- Planning and Guiding In-Class Peer Review

Observations:

Learning happens best when class sessions are clear and organized.

Clarity and organization are cornerstones of effective teaching. Transparency of learning goals and the methods for reaching those goals, setting clear expectations for student work, and creating a clear path through the learning process are invaluable elements to helping students succeed in our courses. Beyond helping students gain mastery of content and simply making the learning experience easier to navigate, clarity and organization are positively correlated with a variety of desirable (and perhaps surprising!) outcomes, such as interest in engaging in intellectually challenging work and openness to new ideas and diverse people.

Examples of evidence to look for:

- Provides class session goals and/or agenda
- Shows a logical flow from idea to idea
- Connects or has students connect between concepts within the class session, those learned previously and those that will be introduced later
- Defines potentially unfamiliar terms
- Uses examples (your own or those of students) to illustrate key points
- Conveys the purpose of each class activity
- Gives clear directions for activities
- Makes an effort to ensure that all students can hear clearly what is being said
- Paces the class to allow for optimal student engagement
- Proficiently employs technology in appropriate ways to support learning
- Easily transitions to a plan B if a tech tool isn't working
- Checks for understanding and reframes complex information
- Communicates the reasoning process behind operations and/or concepts

Resources:

- Instructional Clarity and Organization: It's Not New or Fancy, but it Matters
- TILT (Transparency in Teaching and Learning): Examples and resources
- Making Better PowerPoint Presentations

Observations:

Learning happens best when diversity, equity, and inclusion are integral to the learning process.

Students learn best when they feel they belong in a learning environment. Students bring diverse lived experiences, backgrounds, knowledge, and identities to the classroom. Leveraging students' prior knowledge and experiences as assets in the classroom can lead to richer understanding of course concepts and deeper critical thinking skills. Connecting course content to students' interests, life experiences, and future aspirations helps them see the value of what they are learning, develop deeper engagement with the course content, and build a culture of purpose in the classroom.

Examples of evidence to look for:

- Uses more than one form of instruction and assessment
- Encourages comments and questions from students with a diversity of identities
- Provides a variety of pathways for students to participate in classroom discussions and activities (large group, small group, pair, individual reflection, technology-aided discourse, etc.)
- Uses diverse examples, cases, images, sources, perspectives, and authorities in the field in order to more inclusively represent our students
- Provides accessible forms of class materials
- Uses students' designated pronouns and preferred names
- Communicates explicitly about the importance of the skills, content, and habits of mind that are being explored in the class
- States the lesson's learning goals and explains how activities and assessments are designed to help students achieve those goals
- Provides constructive, targeted, and encouraging feedback to students during class activities
- Inspires students to make connections between the course content and their lived experiences, interests, and future aspirations
- Provides activities and assessments that draw on disciplinary practices to provide real-world applications for course content
- Provides opportunities for students to "customize" their learning by tailoring assignments to their personal and professional interests and needs

Observations:

Areas to Address with Instructor:

Strengths:

Areas for Improvement:

Resources:

- Accessible Technology at Temple
- Office of Disability Resources and Services
- Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Progression Rubric
- Authentic Assessment Toolbox
- Equity Minded Teaching
- Asset Mapping: An Equity-Based Approach to Improving Student Team Dynamics
- R-E-S-P-E-C-T: Use the Pronouns Right for Thee
- How You Can be a More Culturally Responsive Educator
- You Are Welcome Here: Helping International Students Feel a Sense of Belonging
- A Little EDvice for Teaching Inclusively

Endnotes:

[1] This instrument has been adapted from A Peer Review Guide for Online Courses at Penn State (2017), an excellent instrument created for peer observations of online courses developed by Ann H. Taylor for Dutton e-Education Institute, College of Earth and Mineral Sciences, The Pennsylvania State University

[2] Freeman, S., et al. (2014). Active Learning Increases Student Performance in Science, Engineering, and Math. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 111(23), 8410-8415. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1319030111