

Peer Observation for Teaching Assessment

The College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences values teaching. Improving instruction in the classrooms and laboratories should lead to enhanced learning for the students, the ultimate goal of education. The College has sponsored and conducted a wide variety of activities and programs that encourage, recognize and reward excellence in teaching.

The Peer Observation for Teaching Assessment program was developed by faculty in the College as a means to assess teaching in addition to the collection of student feedback through ICES. The term assessment is important; peer observation for teaching assessment is not an evaluation measure for summative information but a formative measure designed to help teachers improve.

This five-step model for teaching assessment was designed by the College in close collaboration with the Office of Instructional Resources, Division of Instructional Development. Since its inception in 1997, more than 100 administrators, faculty, research associates and graduate students have participated in the peer assessment activities. The program has been funded by the Provost's Initiative on Teaching Assessment, the UIUC Teaching Advancement Board, ACES Academic Programs, the ACES Academy of Teaching Excellence, and the Warren K. Wessels Endowment.

PEER OBSERVATION OF TEACHING

Guidelines to the Five Part System

Practice Observation

Observers can look for a number of things that do not require a pre-observation conference. Essentially, the observer wants to gain a 'sense' of being in someone else's classroom, and the instructor wants to become comfortable with having an observer in the classroom. PITA participant teams (course participants and their mentors) are encouraged to "sit in" on each other's classes as a warm-up to the five part peer observation system, outlined below.

Part 1: Identification

The identification portion of peer observation is designed to help participants understand the instructional goals associated with a particular course, session, and instructor. Setting the instructional goals will later enable both parties to establish the specific teaching elements for feedback to the instructor. As an instructor, you want to give the observer an opportunity to understand the context of your course, so that the observer can look for the areas where you feel you need help. Remember that goals include the learner behaviors (what the learners will be able to do as a result of the class) and the teacher strategies (what the teacher will do to help ensure student learning).

Part 2: Dialogue One

The pre-observation conference (Dialogue One) helps the observer understand the context for the instructor's particular class. The primary goal of this first meeting is to engage in a dialogue to review the instructor's course/class goals, teaching strategies, learning objectives, past problems, perceived strengths, etc. This meeting will serve to identify the elements where the instructor needs the most help. Another result of this dialogue will be to collaboratively identify any parts of the classroom experience that the observer feels are necessary for observation. "What to look for" should be decided by both parties and be based on previous observations, ICES, or other feedback mechanisms. This first dialogue will also identify the role the observer will take during the observation.

Part 3: The Observation

The actual observation is the primary part of the system designed to improve teaching. The observer and teacher will have discussed what specific behaviors the instructor wants the observer to look for during the class session. The observer is in the unique position to gather more and richer information on the class than the instructor can. Keep in mind that for the instructor to make effective teaching-related decisions the observer's data collection must:

- Be specific;

- Be accurate;
- Be descriptive;
- Contain irrefutable evidence; and
- Relate to the goals that are defined by the teacher being observed.

The observation should be guided by the specific teaching elements as defined in the pre-observation dialogue.

Part 4: Dialogue Two

The post-observation dialogue (Dialogue Two) is designed to allow the teacher and observer to review the observations regarding the goal(s) the instructor set for that day's class session. As such, this second dialogue should focus on helping the faculty member to understand the events that transpired during the observed class session. The dialogue should take place as close to the time of the observation as possible. In order for the instructor to make effective changes to teaching, peer feedback should be:

- Specific
- Focused
- Concrete
- Action oriented
- Accurate
- Clear
- Honest
- Positively Phrased

Part 5: Post-Observation Write-ups & Action Plans

The peer observation write-up generates a set of action steps that will positively affect an instructor's teaching. The post-observation write-up is a result of the dialogue between the observer and the observed, and should be written collaboratively. This document should be:

- descriptive, not evaluative
- specific
- focused on behavior
- take into account the needs of the receiver and the giver of feedback
- focused to include only the amount of information the receiver can process

The action steps should serve as a basis for follow-up observations. In particular, an observer could look for changes in an instructor's teaching based on the agreed upon action steps from the previous observation. Thus, multiple observations will be required to gain an accurate picture of the evolution of teaching over time.

Instructor Name _____ Observer Name _____

Date of Observation _____ Course and Section _____

Practice Observation

Guidelines

Observers can look for a number of things that do not require a pre-observation conference. Essentially, the observer wants to gain a 'sense' of being in someone else's classroom, and the instructor wants to become comfortable with having an observer in the classroom. PITA Teams (instruction and their mentors) are encouraged to "sit in" on each other's classes as a warm-up to the five-part peer observation system, outlined below.

To gain a 'sense' of someone else's classroom, gather information about:

Class Syllabus

- cohesive
- understandable
- clear expectations
- accurate

Classroom Environment

- walls / lighting / seating / layout
- technology
- general atmosphere

Teacher Qualities

- preparedness
 - on-time
 - room ready
 - notes / lesson plan

- presentation skills
 - introduction / presentation
 - pace / timing / clarity
 - participation / feedback
 - direction giving

Instructional Qualities

- student centered / active learning techniques
- checking for understanding / reinforcement of ideas / application of material

Practice Observation

Be General

“Soak in” the environment

Play dual role of

student
observer

Keep dual notes:

Observat'ns

Reflect'ns

Timing: Strategy

Boardwork

Class Notes

Post-Observation Dialogue for Checking

Instructor Name _____ Observer Name _____

Date of Observation _____ Course and Section _____

Part 1: Identification

“Setting the Goals”

Guidelines

The identification portion of peer observation is designed to help participants understand the instructional goals associated with a particular course, session, and instructor. Setting the instructional goals will enable both parties to establish the specific teaching elements for feedback to the instructor. As an instructor, you want to give the observer an opportunity to understand the context of your course, so that the observer can look for the areas where you feel you need help. Remember that goals include the learner behaviors (what the learners will be able to do as a result of the class) and the teacher strategies (what the teacher will do to help ensure student learning).

To help the observer understand the purpose of the observation, the instructor should prepare answers to the following questions:

What are the goals of this course?

What are the goals and learning objectives of the specific class?

What teaching strategies will be used to achieve these class goals?

What aspects of my teaching do I want feedback on?

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Part 2: Dialogue One

“Understanding the Context”

Guidelines

The pre-observation conference (Dialogue One) helps participants understand the context for the instructor’s particular class. The primary goal of this first meeting is to engage in a dialogue to review the instructor’s course/class goals, teaching strategies, learning objectives, past problems, perceived strengths, etc. This meeting will serve to identify the elements where the instructor needs the most help. Another result of this dialogue will be to collaboratively identify any parts of the classroom experience that the observer feels are necessary for observation. “What to look for” should be decided by both parties and be based on previous observations, ICES, or other feedback mechanisms. This first dialogue will also identify the role of the observer will take during the observation.

To understand the class context, the observer should ask the faculty member questions such as:

What is/are the goal(s) of today’s class? What is/are the goal(s) of the course?

1. lesson plan
2. curriculum outline
3. class syllabus
4. content of previous student feedback (ICES and early feedback)

What type of course is this? How does it fit into the student’s overall curriculum?

5. lecture / activity / seminar / laboratory / other
6. required / general education / elective / personal interest
7. developmental / lower division / upper division / graduate
8. role in degree program (critical / introductory)
9. length of session / lecture / activities / # of times per week
10. recent changes in program / course / student outcomes

What knowledge, skills, and attitudes does the instructor expect from students?

11. as a result of the course
12. as a result of the session / lecture

What is the student make-up of the instructor’s class?

13. number of students / grade levels / backgrounds / other

Instructor Name _____ Observer Name _____

Date of Observation _____ Course and Section _____

Part 2: Dialogue One (cont'd)

What type of technology used in this class?

14. distance education / computers / specialized lab equipment / other

What is the instructors role in this course?

15. number of times previously taught

16. primary teaching methods / strategies of teaching

17. degree of student input

18. special problems / constraints

What, if any, concerns does the instructor have regarding this course?

What type of teaching strategies are going to be using in today's class?

19. lecture / discussion

20. large group work / group activities

21. demonstration / experiment

22. role play

23. case study

24. resource person

25. field trip

26. supervised study

What components of your teaching would you like me to be especially aware of during today's session?

27. new techniques

28. problem students

29. other

Conclusion

As the final step in the pre-observation dialogue, the observer and instructor will need to agree on the specific behaviors to be observed. These specifics should be the culmination of all of the pre-observation work that was done by both parties.

Complete the following sentence together:

Therefore, today I will look for..."

Instructor _____

Peer Observer _____

Dialogue One: Preobservation Form

The purpose of the preobservation conference is to review the instructor's teaching strategies and to discuss the role of the observer during and after the observation.

1. What knowledge, skills, and attitudes do you expect from students?

a. Course _____

b. Lecture(s) _____

2. Type of course and role in curriculum

- a. lecture / activity / seminar / laboratory / other
- b. required / general education / elective / personal interest
- c. developmental / lower division / upper division / graduate
- d. role in degree program (critical / introductory)
- e. technology: computers / distance / other
- f. student population (e.g., number of students, mix, other)
- g. role of observed class in course or program (previous, future)
- h. length of lecture / times per week
- i. recent changes in program / course / student outcomes
- j. other

Instructor Name _____ Observer Name _____

Date of Observation _____ Course and Section _____

Part 3: The Observation

Guidelines

The actual observation is the primary part of the system to improve teaching. The observer and teacher will have discussed what specific behaviors the instructor wants the observer to look for during the class session. The observer is in the unique position to gather more and richer information on the class than the instructor can. Keep in mind that for the instructor to make effective teaching-related decisions the observer's data collection must:

- Be specific
- Be accurate
- Be descriptive
- Contain irrefutable evidence
- Relate to the goals that are defined by the teaching being observed

The observation should be guided by the specific teaching elements as defined in the pre-observation dialogue.

“Therefore, today I will look for...”

Instructor Name _____ Observer Name _____

Date of Observation _____ Course and Section _____

Part 3: The Observation Data Collection Sheet

When observing teaching, collect data related to the Learning Objectives for that day's session.

Objectives: _____

Observed Behaviors	Specific Feedback

Instructor Name _____

Observer Name _____

Date of Observation _____

Course and Section _____

Observed Behaviors

Specific Feedback

Observed Behaviors	Specific Feedback

Instructor Name _____ Observer Name _____

Date of Observation _____ Course and Section _____

Part 4: Dialogue Two

Guidelines

The post-observation dialogue (Dialogue Two) is designed to allow the teacher and observer to review the observations regarding the goal(s) the instructor set for that day's class session. As such, this second dialogue should focus on helping the faculty member to understand the events that transpired during the observed class session. The dialogue should take place as close to the time of the observations as possible. In order for the instructor to make effective changes to their teaching, peer feedback should be:

- Specific
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- Honest
- Positively Phrased

To initiate and sustain the post-observation dialogue try the following:

Let the discussion be guided by the observation purpose as defined in the pre-observation dialogue.

“Therefore, today I will look for ...”

Begin with positive elements and support with irrefutable evidence.

“I noticed when you _____. Students really reacted well to that! There was one young man who got so excited he stood up and started waving his arm to get your attention...”

Focus your efforts on the facts and not on the faculty member you are reviewing.

“When you _____, is that what you wanted to have happen?”

“When you _____, I noticed/felt/observed/reacted....”

Together, summarize the dialogue by documenting:

- Positive elements of the instructor's teaching
- Critical areas for: change, experimentation; and improvement.

The observer should also suggest additional areas to concentrate on during the next observation. The instructor may not be aware of some “problems” that are recognized by the observer. “Next time, I'd also like to watch for _____.”

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Part 5: Post-Observation Write-ups & Action Plans

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The peer observation write-up generates a set of action steps that will positively affect an instructor's teaching. The post-observation write-up is a result of the dialogue between the observer and the observed, and should be written collaboratively. This document should be:

- descriptive, not evaluative
- specific
- focused on behavior
- take into account the needs of the receiver and the giver of feedback
- directed toward behavior which the receiver can do something about
- focused to include only the amount of information the receiver can process, no more

The action steps should serve as a basis for follow-up observations. In particular, an observer could look for changes in an instructor's teaching based on the agreed upon action steps from the previous observation. Thus, multiple observations will be required to gain an accurate picture of the evolution of teaching over time.

When documenting a peer observation, at a minimum be sure to include:

The agreed upon specific teaching elements under observation.

The faculty member's teaching goal(s) for that day.

Specific teacher behaviors related to these goals.

Specific student behaviors related to these goals.

Areas in which you believe the instructor has improved.

Areas that could be further improved.

Action plan for change.

General positive comments.