

CENTER FOR TEACHING EXCELLENCE

Guidelines for Peer Review of Teaching

Peer review of teaching is important for maintaining the quality of teaching and learning in a department. It provides faculty members with an opportunity to discuss and receive feedback on their teaching. It has the following potential benefits:

- Draws upon the disciplinary expertise of colleagues
- Contributes to a collegial academic culture

Considering that academic fields may have unique teaching styles and/or requirements, departments can use these guidelines to develop a peer review process that best fits their specific needs. These guidelines are based on both experiences and practices at Cornell, as well as published research.

In general, effective peer review of classroom teaching includes the following steps:

- a pre-observation meeting
- a classroom observation
- a post-observation debriefing
- a written summary documenting the process

This process can typically be carried out in two to three hours.

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Pre-Observation Meeting

Best practices suggest that the observer meet with the instructor before the class observation to discuss the instructor's plan for the class. It may also be helpful to review teaching materials that were developed for the class. Materials may include:

- The course syllabus
- Any teaching materials the colleague has prepared for that class that might be relevant such as handouts, pre-class quizzes, homework assignments due that day, teaching notes, PowerPoint slides, or an overall teaching plan

During the pre-observation meeting the observer can benefit from discussing the following with the instructor:

- What do you want the students to have learned by the end of this class?
- What will happen in the class? What can I, as the observer, expect to see?
- How does this class fit in with the overall course?
- What pre-class work will the students have done for this class?
- Are there specific aspects of the class on which the instructor would like to receive feedback?

For further information on this resource and more, please contact the CTE at:

Class Observation

Best practices in peer review propose that a core set of criteria be used in the observation process, and that departments discuss and establish criteria appropriate for their field. These criteria may vary among fields. In the pre-observation meeting the instructor and observer identify two to three criteria on which the observer will focus during the class. The following criteria have been cited as factors that contribute to better student learning.

Sample Criteria:

- *Clarification of class purpose:* How well does the instructor convey the focus for the class?
- *Organization of class structure:* Are the class materials and activities well organized?
- *Reinforcement of major concepts:* Does the instructor emphasize the major concepts being covered? Do the activities and materials utilized in class reinforce the major concepts?
- *Pacing and scope:* Is the material presented at a suitable rate? Is the amount of material covered reasonable?
- *Classroom atmosphere:* Has the instructor established a safe and respectful classroom atmosphere conducive to student learning? Has the instructor created an inclusive class environment?
- *Consideration of diversity:* Does the instructor acknowledge or interact with a broad range of students? Is the instructor respectful of diverse opinions and perspectives? Does the instructor employ a diverse set of activities or methods to accommodate a range of student learning styles?
- *Class management:* Does the instructor effectively manage the class?
- *Balance between abstract and concrete:* If applicable, is there an appropriate balance between abstract and concrete concepts?
- *Classroom assessment:* If applicable, in what ways does the instructor check for comprehension and solicit feedback?

Post Observation Meeting and Reporting

It is recommended that departments discuss and develop a post-observation process that reflects departmental teaching expectations and priorities for peer review.

Following the class observation, the observer and instructor meet to review their assessment of the class.

A written summary to document the observation process is recommended and generally includes the following:

- pre-observation meeting notes
- class observation notes (with emphasis on the 2-3 aspects of the class on which the observer was asked to focus)
- post-observation meeting notes

Additional Resource

Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE) staff can assist departments or individuals with the peer review process. For further information on the peer review of teaching, please contact the CTE at cornellcte@cornell.edu or 607-255-3990.

The following resources are available on the Center for Teaching Excellence website:

- Peer Review Observer and Instructor Forms
- References for Peer Review of Teaching
<http://cornell.edu/cte/documenting-teaching/peer-review-of-teaching/index.html>

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