

## Establishing a Department Peer Review Process

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The following suggestions are designed to support departments getting started with peer review of teaching. These recommendations are adapted from a review of practices and recommendations such as, “A Protocol for Peer Review of Teaching” (Brent & Felder, 2004) and others (La Lopa, 2012) at peer institutions nationally .

Peer review of teaching is a contractually mandated process at Wayne State, and all tenure track and tenured faculty must be reviewed. The Provost’s Office recommends that faculty are reviewed in at least the second, fourth, and tenth years of employment. Reviews during these employment years allow enough time to absorb results and to make positive changes during typical promotion milestones. Faculty members may also request peer reviews at any other time *they feel it would be personally useful*.

The WSU peer review of teaching process is designed to be formative in nature, meant to supply a faculty member with feedback on his or her teaching solely for the purpose of the faculty member’s own improvement, with the end goal of improved student learning. Successful peer review of teaching programs consider the following concepts or practices:

- The peer review of teaching process promotes student learning
- Faculty (and chairs) identify minimum criteria that define effective teaching
- Peer review of teaching is a non-judgmental process, and it is suggested that all feedback is constructive and as specific to the individual as possible
- A collegial relationship among faculty helps to promote a successful peer review of teaching process.

### A DEPARTMENT COMMITTEE ON PEER REVIEW OF TEACHING

Departments may wish to consider the following steps as they move toward establishing a peer review process:

1. A department might set up a Peer Review Committee. Faculty participation is particularly important in the development of guidelines and procedures.
2. The members of a Peer Review Committee may include: the department chair, faculty within the department, and, faculty from other departments of a related discipline willing to serve as reviewers. It is recommended (University of Michigan, 2013) that reviewers model the following qualities:

- Tenured faculty or non-tenured faculty with primarily teaching and advising responsibilities.
  - At least three years of teaching experience.
  - An understanding of the criteria to be used in the peer review process as well as the material taught in the course under review. In this case, faculty from other departments can function as reviewers but only if the departments are of a similar discipline.
  - Faculty reviewers do not have to be award winning teachers, but their commitment to teaching should be widely acknowledged in their department and among their peers.
  - An acknowledgement that there are many correct ways to teach, and that a rigid, one-size-fits-all teaching style is not conducive to student learning across all subjects.
  - An unbiased attitude regarding the colleagues he or she will review.
3. Once established, A Peer Review Committee can develop department-specific procedures, seek contributions and feedback from peers, and initiate appropriate workshops for potential reviewers, and coordinate related formative assessment activities.

## **PEER REVIEW COMMITTEE ROLES**

Successful peer review committees promote activities such as:

1. Early in the semester, the Peer Review Committee may arrange to provide a training session for faculty reviewers (usually only one to two hours are needed). Ideally, the faculty member conducting the training session will have prior experience serving as a faculty reviewer. It may also be helpful to collaborate with an Office for Teaching and Learning (OTL) consultant at this stage.
  - a. Depending on the needs of the department, a training session may contain the following elements:
    - A discussion of the departmental parameters, expectations, and roles during the observation process (see suggestions below).
    - The presentation of a sample set of course materials (e.g., videos of lectures and other pedagogical strategies) for the reviewers in training. It is best if the materials vary in quality in order to make the session as instructive as possible.
    - Participants may complete sample rating forms or other materials that will likely be used to assess instructor teaching to gain familiarity with these resources.
    - It is essential to leave time for participants to discuss the process and their reasons for particular ratings and suggestions for improvement.

2. Departments may benefit from ongoing formative assessment of the peer review process. As departments gain experience with what works and what does not in their peer review process, the Peer Review Committee will likely want to consider modifications.
  - a. The peer review process will be an extended endeavor; therefore the burden of the process on those faculty members who serve as peer reviewers will need to be considered so as not to impinge upon the central research and teaching work of faculty.
  - b. As an ongoing process, departments may benefit from revisions and refinements based on regular participant assessment and feedback. Reviewers, reviewees, chairs, and perhaps students can be asked to contribute feedback via a range of methods suitable to the unit (e.g., email, poll, selected focus groups, etc.).
  - c. After procedural agreements have been reached, departments may wish to consider a brief description and general outline of their procedure for peer review of teaching in their bylaws and other appropriate policy documents.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR PEER OBSERVATION**

A possible process of peer review might include the following steps:

1. The Peer Review Committee facilitates mutually agreeable matches between peer reviewers and instructors.
2. Review of Course Materials
  - The observer examines examples of materials used in the course to understand the teacher's perception of what is important in the course as well as the teacher's pedagogical style, the context of the particular learning activities to be observed, and how the particular class meeting to be observed fits into the key learning outcomes goals of the course.
3. Pre-observation Consultation
  - The observer meets with the teacher prior to observing the teacher in class to discuss the course materials, course goals, specific teaching strategies, and how the class meeting to be observed fits into the design of the course as a whole.
  - The teacher has the chance to inform the observer of what aspects of teaching the teacher would like the observer to take note of and what nature of feedback would be most useful.

- In this pre-observation consultation, it will be helpful to share any particular checklist or other framework that will guide the peer observation process as part of the formative process.

#### 4. Teaching Observation

- The observer sits in on a mutually-agreed teaching event (a lecture, discussion section, lab, etc.), making notes and paying particular attention to the aspects the teacher had previously mentioned.
- On the day of the observation, students should be informed simply that there is a visiting faculty member sitting in on the class that day.
- As one option, the observer may use an agreed upon checklist and/or scoring system as a framework to insure that all important aspects of teaching are noted. Using a checklist may help remind the reviewer of the wide range of relevant behaviors that contribute to good teaching. Departments can tailor the recommended checklist to priorities determined by faculty discussions used to develop peer mentoring procedures. Examples of such checklists can be found at the OTL website at [www.otl.wayne.edu](http://www.otl.wayne.edu).
- We do not recommend a survey of students be conducted as a part of the peer review process because students already have the opportunity to provide feedback through other formative (the *OTL Mid Semester Assessment Program*) and summative (Student Evaluations of Teaching) processes. The peer review of teaching process is designed to emphasize peer feedback unavailable through other means.
- Specifically, only one faculty reviewer should be involved in the peer review process; this reviewer should only share the results of the peer review with the instructor.

#### 5. Post Observation Consultation and Feedback

- The observer meets with the teacher sometime after the teaching observation to revisit areas of focus from the pre-observation consultation. It is most effective if this happens relatively soon so perspectives are fresh.
- The observer solicits the teacher's perceptions about how the class meeting went, both in terms of what approaches were successful and where challenges arose.
- The observer and teacher review any notes and checklists the observer completed while observing the course.
- It is important that observer feedback on teaching be as specific to the teacher or course as possible, with specific examples from the teaching observation cited during the discussion. The discussion must also be conducted in a supportive, non-judgmental manner by the observer.

- The observer and teacher may then discuss particular suggestions and actions the instructor can take to improve teaching.

## 6. Documentation

- Soon after the post observation consultation, the observer should provide the teacher with a final set of notes, checklists, and recommended actions.
- Information gathered during a formative review is typically not shared with anyone other than the faculty member asking for the review (La Lopa, 2012).
- The faculty members under review may also wish to write a report stating their acknowledgement of the aspects of their teaching strategies requiring improvement.
- Because peer review is formative at Wayne State, the only documentation from the reviewer to the department chair at the end of the review process is a notification that the review has been completed and that the observer's feedback was discussed with the teacher.
- Reviewers can include evidence of their participation in the process under the teaching or service sections of their annual faculty reports and should receive due credit. As noted above, instructors may, at their own discretion, note in their annual review and / or promotion and tenure materials that they participated in peer review of teaching and in what capacity.

## **OFFICE OF TEACHING AND LEARNING**

The Office for Teaching and Learning is a resource for WSU faculty, emphasizing pedagogical innovation, promoting inclusive course design and assessment methods, and advocating best practices in the implementation of instructional technology in traditional, hybrid, and online environments. To this end, the OTL sponsors a variety of individual consultation services and department and campus wide workshops. To assist departments in running a peer review of teaching process, the OTL will supply examples of applied resource materials (e.g., class observation checklists, discussion worksheets, tips for being observed, tips for peer observers, etc.), examples of peer review materials developed by WSU colleagues, a selected annotated bibliography on faculty peer review, and suggested guidelines that may be helpful in the development, implementation and assessment of peer review processes in programs and departments. The OTL provides consultation services to departments and programs as a complement to the disciplinary expertise of peer reviewers. Additionally, the OTL can support units during the process of defining and establishing their peer review processes, help prepare colleagues to be peer reviewers, and support feedback and assessment measures as the program unfolds. More information about the WSU OTL services can be found at <http://www.otl.wayne.edu/>.

## References

- Brent, R., & Felder, R. M. (2004). *A Protocol for Peer Review of Teaching*. Paper presented at the American Society for Engineering Education Annual Conference & Exposition.
- La Lopa, J. (2012). A Scholarly Approach to a Peer Review of Teaching. *Journal of Cullinary Science, 10*(4), 352-364.
- University of Michigan. (2013). Guidelines for Evaluating Teaching. Retrieved 10/29/13, 2013, from <http://www.crlt.umich.edu/tstrategies/guidelines> .