A Guide to Conducting Peer Observations of Teaching

Observation Checklist

The point of the observation is just that—observing, recording, and offering a student’s-eye perspective on class climate, interaction, organization, organization, and ultimately effectiveness. Use the observation checklist to describe clearly and objectively what happens during the class.

- Review your notes on the Pre-Observation Questionnaire to remind yourself of the faculty member’s goals.
- Arrive early.
- Introduce yourself and your purpose in working with your colleague to have a discussion about good teaching and to improve the quality of teaching throughout the University. It is important to make students feel at ease and to clarify that you are not evaluating them.
- Sit in the back and clarify whether or not the instructor would like you to participate in any group activity.
- Complete the classroom observation checklist during a face-to-face class session or use the Quality Course Teaching and Instructional Practice (QCTIP) scorecard for online courses. NOTE: The checklist may be shared with the instructor as part of the post-observation conversation, but it is unlikely that the raw data of the checklist would be shared as part of a summative evaluation for review or recommendation.

Post-Observation Evaluation and Assessment

- After observing, reflect upon the pre-observation goals, the syllabus and other documents, as well as the details of the class observed.
- Complete the Classroom Teaching Observation Rubric for face-to-face courses or the QCTIP for online courses.
- For both online and face-to-face observations, prepare brief summary comments based on the rubrics. Structure comments around the following three categories:
  - Overall strengths
  - Area(s) of Focus for Continuous Improvement
  - Action Plan for Professional Development or Continuous Improvement (see some examples below)
- Meet within one week of the observation to share and discuss the observation. Start by listening to the instructor’s own self-reflection about the class session, then move into the observed features of the course.
- Through dialogue between the observer and instructor, draft an action plan for how to get additional resources, professional development, or model materials or activities to help address needs.
• Refer instructors to the Center for Academic Innovation and Faculty Support (CAIFS) for follow-up as appropriate.

It is important to note that neither the observer nor the instructor needs to have expertise in all types of learning or innovations in pedagogy. They only need to identify the instructor’s goals and most successful areas of the class and consider possible ways to expand on and enhance these strengths. Additional resources are available for follow-up meetings with CAIFS staff.

Sample Action Plans

1. If an online course relies heavily on multimedia materials, but the Ally accessibility rating for the course is low, the action plan may involve working with CAIFS to find appropriate tools and strategies for applying principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in the course.

2. If a course is starting to rely heavily and productively on projects to encourage students to apply knowledge and create new solutions based on course content, the action plan may involve attending a webinar on project-based learning (PBL) to refine those strategies, scaffold formative assessments to strengthen the final project, and make PBL the cornerstone of the whole course.

3. If the class session is engaging and demonstrates great examples of collaborative student learning, but the syllabus does not highlight the importance of engagement or including collaboration among student goals or learning outcomes, the action plan could suggest a review and revision of the syllabus to ensure that course materials are consistent with course practice. See Christine Harrington’s *Designing a Motivational Syllabus* for examples. Copies are available in the CAIFS library.