Teaching, Learning & Technology Center
Division of Undergraduate Education/UC Irvine

8 BEST PRACTICES
PEER REVIEW/OBSERVATION

1. *Standardize the Tools & Procedures*

The best way to save time is to collaboratively create the tools you will use for peer review, and to agree on procedures for their use. If not perfect, the tools should at least have criteria and standards with which the members of the department can live.

Resources:
There are many examples of types of peer observation tools available:

- Nancy Van Note Chism (2007). *Peer Review of Teaching: A Sourcebook* (2nd ed.) Bolton, MA: Anker.
- Arreola, R.A. (2007). *Developing a Comprehensive Faculty Evaluation System: A Guide to Designing, Building, and Operating Larger-Scale Evaluation Systems* (3rd ed.). Bolton, MA: Anker.
- http://www1.umn.edu/ohr/teachlearn/resources/peer/guidelines
- http://ctl.utexas.edu/teaching-resources/advance-your-career/prepare-for-peer-observation/
- http://cfe.unc.pdfs/FYC15.pdf
- http://albany.edu/teachingandlearning/tlr/peer_obs/index.shtml

2. *Make Peer Review Part of a Larger Teaching Effort*

Ideally, peer review is voluntary; however, peer review should be part of a larger teaching effort that emphasizes that excellence in teaching is important for all faculty, at all levels. It should be part of a continuing professional development program, rather than an occasional activity associated only with remediation. It should also be balanced, highlighting both commendations and recommendations.

In "From Idea to Prototype: The Peer Review of Teaching" (1994-1996b), Shulman noted that

> *the culture of higher education settings has developed a strong norm of privacy [that] inhibits what Boyer (1990) has termed the scholarship of teaching, the thoughtful, problem-solving, discipline-based approach to teaching that involves continual reasoning about instructional choices, awareness of the solutions that other scholars have made to key problems facilitating student learning in the field, and active, ongoing research about the effects of instructor actions on student learning.*[1]

3. ***Combine Formative & Summative Review***

Ideally, peer review consists of both formative and summative measures, using tools appropriate to each type of review. Formative assessment should be very detailed, and occur at regularly scheduled intervals; summative evaluation is more normative and also scheduled well in advance.

Resources:

- The TLTC provides free and confidential formative assessment to all instructors. Consultative services include videotaping, midterm feedback, and review of any other teaching-related materials the instructor chooses to submit. The instructor may then choose to submit his/her videotape to the faculty review committee.
- The TLTC's Midterm Feedback Form is available on EEE through the instructor's toolbox link. To learn "how-to," see https://eee.uci.edu/help/eval/instructors/#what

4. ***Use Multiple Data Sources***

Peer observation should provide just one aspect of an instructor's teaching. A teaching portfolio, end-of-term evaluations, student portfolios, data from focus group interviews, etc., can all be rich sources of information.

Resources:

- The TLTC can assist faculty in compiling a teaching portfolio; we can also come to classes to speak with students to conduct a Small Group Instructional Diagnostic (SGID) focus group.
- Carnegie Mellon has a useful website to assist with the portfolio development as well: http://www.cmu.edu/teaching/resources/DocumentingYourTeaching/TeachingPortfolios/TeachingPortfolios.pdf
- Vanderbilt University Teaching Portfolios: http://cft.vanderbilt.edu/teaching-guides/reflecting/teaching-portfolios/

5. ***Practice***

Pilot test the tools by having 2-3 reviewers use them to observe another; meet to compare results and to fine tune the tools. Reciprocal reviews are also useful.

Resources:

- The TLTC can videotape an instructor and create DVDs for peer review provided the reviewers will also provide consultation.
- The TLTC will also review the DVD and meet with faculty to discuss the analysis.

6. ***Conduct Pre-Observation Meetings***

Give the instructor at least two weeks notice of the upcoming observation; at least one week before, meet with the instructor to discuss the lesson plan for the class that will be observed/videotaped. Collect any additional data such as the syllabus, copies of assignments, and/or previous evaluations. Review how these materials will be assessed, as well.

The pre-observation should also include review of the observation tool to make sure the observer and the observed understand the criteria in the same ways. Confirm the date and time for the consultation, and how long the observer will stay or how long the filmed segment will be.

Resources:

- *Example: Pre-Observation Meeting* (attached)
- The Chism text also has numerous assessment tools for course materials

7. During the Consultation

There is no one best way to take notes during a consultation. For formative assessment, however, detailed notes should be taken, including concrete examples. Double-entry narratives are useful: write observations on the right-hand side of the page with analysis on the left (see attached example from Chism, p. 107).

8. Conduct Post-Observation Consultation

While student evaluations can provide a modest improvement in teaching, student feedback with consultation quadruples the effort.[2]

> *Marsh and Roche (1993) wrote, "The most robust finding from the SET [students' evaluation of teaching] feedback research is that consultation augments the effects of written summaries of SETs" (p. 223). Other forms of augmentation, including workshops and seminars (Rader, 1995), use of self-help materials (Cohen & Herr, 1982), and student focus groups (Tiberius et al., 1989) have not provided comparable levels of improvement in teaching.[3]*

Ideally, the instructor should receive feedback within a week of the observation, with concrete examples of what's working and why, as well as specific suggestions and rationales for improvement.

---

[1]Hutchings, P. (Ed.). (1995). *From Idea to Prototype: the Peer Review of Teaching: A Project Workbook.* Sterling, VA: Stylus.

[2] Penny, Angela R., Coe, Robert (2204). Effectiveness of Consultation on Student Rating Feedback: a Meta-Analysis. *Review Of Educational Research,* 74: 215. http://rer.sagepub.com/content/74/2/215.full.pdf+html

[3] *Ibid.*