

Peer Observation of Teaching

Approved 5/04/2021

Central to the University's mission is the support of effective pedagogy and the advancement of student learning. Faculty can benefit the most when feedback is regular and timely. To comply with university policy, instructors within the department of Art History & Archaeology will undergo peer observation at least once per year, with the priority given to tenure-track faculty. Assignments will be distributed generally in the first faculty meeting of each semester. Note that for tenure-track faculty, the APT process requires that a *tenured* faculty member conduct an observation. However, faculty of any rank may serve as peer observers.

The peer observation process consists of 4 main parts, each of which is designed to (1) provide a framework for a collegial conversation on teaching and learning as well as (2) document substantive feedback in preparation for promotion review. Observations are "formative" in that they are not intended to score the sum of our ability, but rather to provide guidance on ways we can enhance our craft as scholar-teachers.

The Observation Process

1. **Pre-Class Meeting:** The pre-class meeting should be arranged no later than one week after the assigned observation. The purpose of a pre-observation conversation is to establish the context for the online class visit. See [Appendix 1](#) for materials to request at this stage, as well as some potential discussion prompts.
2. **Classroom Observation:** At least one complete class meeting should be observed in the least-intrusive manner possible. Ideally, the observation should be scheduled *before* the eighth week of the semester. See [Appendix 2](#) and [Appendix 3](#) for one approach to organizing observation notes.
3. **Synthesis & Documentation** – Following the observation, the observer prepares a summary reflection on the meetings. Notes and feedback forms do not necessarily need to be included. The summary reflection should be received by the instructor being observed no later than 10 days after the observation.
4. **Post-Observation Meeting** – After the class meeting(s) and upon receipt of the observation report (and no more than two weeks after the observation), both the observer and the instructor can have a structured conversation to reflect on each other's comments and discuss possible strategies for enhancing effectiveness, student engagement, course efficiency, and student outcome equity. See [Appendix 4](#) for some discussion prompts.

This template was adapted from the Peer Observation Teaching Guide from the Teaching & Learning Transformation Center at the University of Maryland, College Park.

Sample Process Timeline

Week 3	Week 4	Week 5-6	Week 7-8	Week 9	Week 10
Observers Assigned	Pre-Observation Meeting	Class Observation	Synthesis & Documentation	Post-Observation Meeting	Summary report filed with the department

Note for Observing Online Courses & Access to ELMS

Due to the nature of online courses, it is preferred that two weeks be allotted for observation of the ELMS course site. Any live web-based class session should also be observed in its entirety. In order to be as unobtrusive as possible, the observer should turn off their microphone and camera during the live observation. Instructors should ask students to select the option "Hide non-video participants" in their Zoom settings.

Peer observers can be enrolled in term-based course spaces in the role of "instructional colleague" using the ELMS Management Tool "Manage Enrollments" at <http://emt.umd.edu> In this role the peer can review content posted by the instructor, but will not have any access to student data or the ability to interact with students in keeping with FERPA requirements. The instructor/owner of the course will use this tool to enroll the observational colleague using either their UID or directory id. This knowledge article identifies in details the permissions for this role: https://umd.service-now.com/itsupport?id=kb_article_view&sysparm_article=KB0013342

Please see [Appendix 3](#) for one approach to organizing observation notes for online courses.

Appendix 1

Pre-Class Meeting Requirements & Prompts

Materials to Request from the Instructor

- Course syllabi, assignment descriptions, assessment rubrics, or any supplemental materials that are germane to the course according to the instruction.
- **For online courses:** request access to the ELMS course site for the week(s) of the evaluation. For courses with synchronous sessions, request the Zoom link to observe the live session as well.

Discussion

Before the observation, a scheduled conversation between the faculty member and the observer should take place. This conversation may take place in person, over the phone, via Zoom, or by any other strategy that permits a substantive conversation. In this conversation, the observer should:

1. Explain the observation process to the faculty member being observed.
2. Ask the instructor to inform the class that a visitor will be observing the course, and (if applicable) the web-based meeting. The class and online learning activities will proceed normally.
3. Provide the instructor with a copy of the Class Meeting Observation Worksheet (Appendix 2).

Potential Discussion Prompts

These should not limit your conversation, but are suggestions to get you started:

Course Syllabus

- Does it include items recommended on faculty.umd.edu/teach/syllabus/?
- Does it have a detailed schedule that helps students understand the structure of the course and plan for major scheduled grading events?

Assessment

- How do you assess student learning and performance? What, in your mind, constitutes solid evidence that they have achieved your goals for the course?
- What steps do you take to ensure that assessments are objective, fair, and appropriately calibrated to the expectations of the course?
- How do you assess whether the course was effective at the end of the semester?

Student Work

- What, if anything, are you expecting that students have done before coming to the upcoming class meeting? What, if any, strategies do you use to ensure that they have done the pre-class work?

Class Meetings

- What are your learning goals for students in the upcoming class meeting? How do you plan to help students achieve those goals?
- What strategies do you use to ensure that students are actively engaged during class meetings?
- What do you do to establish a positive, supportive, and inclusive classroom climate?

Feedback

What feedback have you received in the past, whether from students or peers, and how have you addressed it?

- Is there anything in particular that you would like to get some specific feedback on from your classroom observation?

Appendix 2

Live Class Meeting Observation Worksheet

This was designed to facilitate your observation notes, but is not necessarily something you would submit as documentation. You can edit the items below to align the worksheet with your pre-class discussion.

By no means should this list constrain your feedback, but here are some things that might be included in your narrative.

Y e s	M o s t l y	S o m e w h a t	N o
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Provide comments for each:

CLASS MEETING LOGISTICS				
The class meeting started and ended on time.				
The instructor appeared well-prepared for the class meeting.				
Objectives for the class meeting were articulated to students.				
In the context of the meeting's objectives, class time was used effectively.				
THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE				
All students appeared to be actively engaged in the class meeting.				
Student questions and input were encouraged and addressed in a respectful manner.				
The classroom felt like a positive, supportive, and inclusive environment.				
Tools, technologies, and/or materials used were effectively designed and helpful to learning.				
GOALS FROM PRE-CLASS MEETING		Things that you hoped to observe or want to include.		

Appendix 3

Online Course Observation Worksheet

By no means should this list constrain your feedback, but here are some things that might be included in your narrative.

Y	M	S	O	N
e	o	t	m	o
s	s	l	e	
	l	y	w	
	y		h	
			a	
			t	

Provide comments for each:

COURSE DESIGN					
Site provides students with instructor information and ways to contact (e.g., email, virtual office hours)					
Syllabus is provided with a clear outline of course policies and procedures (e.g., grading policy, academic honesty).					
Deadlines and announcements are clearly presented.					
Instructor uses the gradebook to provide information on progress to students in the course.					
General grading criteria or rubrics are provided for assignments.					
Navigational cues are provided to help students figure out where to begin and how best to move through the course. All links are updated and in working order.					
CLASS SESSIONS					
In the context of the class meeting's objectives, class time was used effectively.					
Objectives for the class meeting (or for asynchronous sessions, the class day or week) were articulated to students.					
Activities and assignments are clear and relevant.					
ONLINE CLIMATE AND COMMUNITY					
Course offers ample opportunities for interaction and communication: student to student, student to instructor and student to content.					
Students are encouraged to participate.					
DISCUSSION / ENGAGEMENT					
Discussion interactions promote higher-order thinking (critical thinking, application, synthesis).					
Instructor actively participates in discussion on a regular basis.					

Appendix 4

Written Narratives & Post Observation Conversation Prompts

Written Narratives

Each observer should prepare a written narrative to document the observation while it is still fresh in their mind (i.e., no later than 10 days after the observation). Try to be specific, constructive, and detailed in your summary so that it is useful to the instructor as guidance. You might consider summarizing (though this is not required):

- Observed strengths and evidence of improvement over time.
- Opportunities for the instructor to be more effective, engaging, efficient, or equitable.
- Resources and activities that would be most beneficial for professional development.

After receiving the observer's narrative, the instructor can prepare a narrative reflecting on the observation experience, the feedback received, and plans for future development. The more specific you are about what you might try going forward, how it might improve learning, and how you plan to assess your effectiveness, the more easily you will be able to document how your teaching has advanced over time in a teaching portfolio.

Post-Observation Meeting

After the observation, the observer should set-up a meeting with the instructor. If a meeting is not possible, a phone or ZOOM conversation is acceptable and should be conducted no later than two weeks after the observation. There is not a formula for the post-class conversation or written narrative. However, here are a few prompts to get started:

Instructor

- In the context of your stated objectives for that class meeting, how did you feel it went?
- Do you feel that the meeting was typical for that particular class? Why or why not?
- What specific aspects of the class meeting did you feel were particularly effective?
- What specific aspects of the class meeting could have been even more effective?

Observer(s)

- In the context of the stated objectives for that class meeting, how did you feel it went?
- What specific aspects of the class meeting did you feel were particularly effective?
 - What specifically did you observe that leads you to think so?
 - How might your own teaching benefit from having observed this?
- What specific aspects of the class meeting could have been even more effective?
 - What specifically did you observe that leads you to think so?
 - What strategies might the instructor consider in the future?
 - Which **TLTC**, College, or Departmental resources could be most helpful?
- What are your overall recommendations for how the instructor can advance student learning outcomes this semester? In future semesters?