THE UNIVERSITY OF
TENNESSEE
KNOXVILLE

TEACHING & LEARNING
INNOVATION

Teaching Evaluation Toolbox

Teaching Evaluation: Peer Evaluation of Teaching as Part of a Whole

USING THIS GUIDE

This tool was created with both the reviewer and the person reviewed in mind. To this end, this guide is divided into two sections – one containing helpful tips for evaluators and the other with advice for those being evaluated. The latter includes faculty up for tenure and lecturers up for review and promotion.

The sections that follow will address the observation process and how both the evaluator and the reviewee can prepare for it, advice on how to write up the results from the observation, and assistance in how to develop a growth plan based on the feedback from evaluators and student feedback. Both sections will discuss expectations for teaching as it relates to the university and will also provide fundamental questions for reviewers to address and for those being evaluated to consider, in the context of departmental expectations for teaching. While the materials in this guide are evidence-based, they are not – by any means – meant to take the place of departmental and university-wide guidelines. We hope that you will see this resource as a means to simplify the observation process and to explore how good reflection can help to enhance the quality of teaching in your department/program.

[What is the evaluation of teaching?]

Author Raoul Arreola of *Developing a Comprehensive Faculty Evaluation System* (2007) defines it as "controlled subjectivity" in applying a set of predetermined values around data collection and interpretation. No matter the approach that a department, college, or school takes in assessing teaching as part of the total evaluation of the faculty, it is recommended that departments take care to make the process transparent, the goals clear to all, and the evaluation itself reflective of multiple aspects of teaching—and of any aspects of a faculty member's roles.

We realize that the teaching evaluation process can be cumbersome, especially given the workload that faculty currently face. **With this in mind, we have designed this guide with the purpose of providing faculty evaluators with a useful tool to help simplify and streamline the process, and assist in preparing those who will be engaging this process at some point of their careers.**

SECTION 1

For the
Reviewers

EXPECTATIONS for the REVIEWER

According to Adkins and Brown (2002, p.1), effective teaching involves being able to "think and problem-solve, to analyse (sic) a topic, to reflect upon what is an appropriate approach, to select key strategies and materials, and to organize and structure ideas, information and tasks for students." While these characteristics are general and standard across the board, it is also important to consider best practices that are unique to your discipline. Once those methods are defined, then deans, department heads, and faculty can draft a set of standards for effective teaching in a program. The following is an excerpt of the teaching standards for tenure and promotion from the Department of Earth and Planetary Sciences:

"**Exceptional performance** as determined by the Department Head may be indicated by recognition of exceptional teaching quality by peer reviews, awards, or other means, by development of new courses, by development of innovative pedagogy, or by effective participation in programs for improvement of pedagogy beyond the normal expectations associated with an evolving teaching program. Exceptional success in student research mentoring can also be recognized as contributing to exceptional teaching performance. Unsatisfactory performance may be indicated by content that is out of date, by disrespect of students, or by ineffective teaching methods as determined through peer and student teaching evaluations."

As you think about what effective teaching looks like in your discpline, consider the following:

> What are the expectations in your discipline?
> What are the expectations outlined in the literature?
> Does your discipline have signature pedagogies (standard methods of teaching) and are there new approaches being adopted?

The Observation Process

The next page contains a summary of the in-class observation process for most departments/ programs on campus. Observations of synchronous classes are very similar; evaluation of asynchronous courses will be addressed later.

While it is not explicitly expressed in the graphic on the next page, classroom observations are often most effective when they are completed as part of a formative assessment of teaching, rather than summative. This gives the faculty member the opportunity to review the results of the observation(s), set pertinent goals for improvement, and implement new teaching strategies if necessary. When used for summative assessment, we recommend having had one or more formative observations first. Then, this same procedure is followed for a summative assessment of teaching. At many universities, there is not a clear distinction between formative and summative—evaluations are used for both.

1 Set up observation time with the faculty member.

2 Review syllabi and other pertinent documentation.

3 Observe the class and take notes.

4 Write up results of observation and send/communicate information to the faculty member.

5 Meet with faculty member if necessary to discuss concerns.

BEFORE The Observation.

It is important for the evaluator to first review all pertinent documentation before visiting the classroom. This allows the reviewer to get a more holistic view of the instructor's perception of students and their learning, teaching philosophy, range of teaching experience and professional development, and level of engagement with students. At a research institution like UT, the systematic asking and answering of research questions is a basic function of the professoriate. It stands to reason that faculty who are proficient in asking and answering research questions could apply that acumen to their teaching for their own benefit and that of others. Thus, evidence of course revision, syllabi creation, review of learning outcomes, and faculty development activities could all indicate points at which faculty asked questions and took action.

The following is a list of documents that can be useful to review before the observation. Keep in mind that some documents may be used for tenure/tenure track faculty reviews rather than lecturer reviews and vice-versa.

> Curriculum Vitae
> Teaching Philsophy
> Diversity Statement
> Lists of courses taught with descriptions
> Sample Syllabi
> Graded student work (with student names redacted)
> Sample assignment descriptions and rubrics
> Course handouts
> Student evaluations of teaching effectiveness
> Documentation of observations and peer evaluations
> Letters from department head and/or peers regarding teaching effectiveness

Additionally, it is also helpful to allow the instructor to reflect upon the class *before* the observation. Give the instructor the opportunity to share with you any pertinent information about the class (e.g., concerns about student behavior, issues surrounding technology, learning outcomes for the class session, handouts) that might impact the results of the observation. It may also be helpful for the instructor to identify what he or she perceives are his or her strengths or weaknesses as it pertains to teaching.

DURING The Observation.

When conducting an observation, faculty are strongly advised to keep observational notes of some type of their visit in order to facilitate reporting of the results. Some departments on campus have created their own observation forms for their use in this process.

Some departments use an observation protocol. An observation protocol is a document that defines what elements of the instruction and student behavior will be identified during the classroom visit. It is not in any way evaluative; it is a tool that helps the observer document how frequently certain teaching and learning behaviors are exhibited in a given class period. There are many available protocols, often developed in-house, but several are well-known nationally. TLI is currently using an adaptation of the Teaching Direct Observation Protocol (TDOP*).

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*TDOP stands for Teaching Dimensions Observation Protocol. Developed by experts at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, this observation protocol is used as a tool for recording the frequency of specific interactions in the classroom within three main dimensions of teaching - Instructional Practices, Student-Teacher Interactions, and Instructional Technology. The adaptation currently used at TLI was developed by Taimi Olsen, Director of the Office of Teaching Excellence and Innovation at Clemson University.

Others include the RTOP (for STEM primarily) and PORTAAL for evidence-based teaching. Users should be aware that training in the use of protocols is needed. On the other hand, by consulting a protocol, faculty observers can educate themselves on the types of teacher behaviors and student behaviors to look for in a visit. The Tickle College of Engineering at UT has a classroom observation form that is also useful.

Set up an observation time with faculty member. Review syllabi and other pertinent documentation. Observe class and take notes. Write up the results of observation and send/communicate information to the faculty member. Meet with the faculty member if necessary to discuss concerns. Evaluators can also visit online courses; the teaching observation can occur in a synchronous course. With asynchronous courses, the "observation" is more of an evaluation of the online course structure and the interactions online. Please contact the Director of Online Programs when observing fully online courses, and for more information on methods for evaluating an online course.

The Write Up...

Once you have completed the observation(s), it is now time to write up the feedback. This process is carried out in a variety of ways. For some departments, the results of the observation are written in the form of a letter from the department head. Another option is an email and/or a form with feedback sent directly to the faculty member. Irrespective of the method utilized to communicate the results, it is important that the process is standardized to promote fairness. As you prepare the feedback, consider the following:

CONSOLIDATE

Meet with the committee members to come to a consensus on the feedback.
Consolidate the comments and make sure they are consistent.

COMMUNICATE

Be mindful of how the feedback is written.
Use the "sandwich method."

COLLABORATE

Provide opportunities for the reviewee to respond to the feedback.
Work together on a growth plan.

1. Consolidate the feedback. Gather all the comments from each reviewer. If there are disagreements among committee members, these should be addressed before consolidating the feedback. Discuss together what happened in the classes and decide whether the expectations outlined in the faculty handbook/bylaws/etc. have been met. If the expectations have not been met, determine what the instructor needs to do (or not do) to improve.

2. Communicate the feedback using the "sandwich method":

    a. Mention first what "worked" in the class. What did the instructor do well? In what ways did the students positively respond? Observers may wish to address the content delivered. Teaching behaviors and content should be addressed in different sections. When conveying teaching feedback, be specific in describing teaching behaviors. For instance, you as the observer may write, "the instructor greeted students by name, asked for questions, then gave a quick overview of the goals of the class session."

    b. Next, you may address a few areas in which the instructor can improve. Be specific about any concerns and highlight evidence in the observation notes of the issues whenever possible. Avoid statements such as: "The class was not engaging." Instead, you might say something like: "Some students were using their cellphones during the class, and not focused on the instruction."

    c. Finally, provide suggestions for improvement. For instance, if the instructor's class is not engaging, provide recommendations – and whenever possible, resources – to help him or her with student engagement. It might also be helpful for the instructor to visit the class of another colleague who is successful with student engagement. If there are a number of issues, focus on the ones that are of most concern. Ideally, the observation process should be formative so that major concerns can be vetted before the summative evaluation.

    d. Provide the observational notes / protocol along with your notes. The observational notes should follow the flow of the class session and will help both observer and instructor remember what happened during the class session.

3. Collaborate with the reviewee on his/her development. Provide opportunities for the reviewee to respond to the feedback and discuss how he or she should do so. Is there a time in which the instructor can meet with you to discuss the feedback? With whom should he or she address any questions or concerns? If necessary, assist the reviewee in developing a growth plan for ongoing improvement/sustaining teaching

For the
Reviewees

Preparing for the Observation

As you prepare for the observation, consider the following:

4. Talk to peers who have already undergone the process.

REFLECT

TALK

ORGANIZE

INFORM

IDENTIFY

3. Organize all required documentation.

5. Reflect upon any feedback that you have received from students. Consider your own knowledge of your strengths.

2. Inform the reviewer(s) of any concerns you have about the observation (e.g., certain student behaviors, technology issues, etc.) beforehand.

1. Identify the learning objectives for the particular class that your reviewer will be visiting.
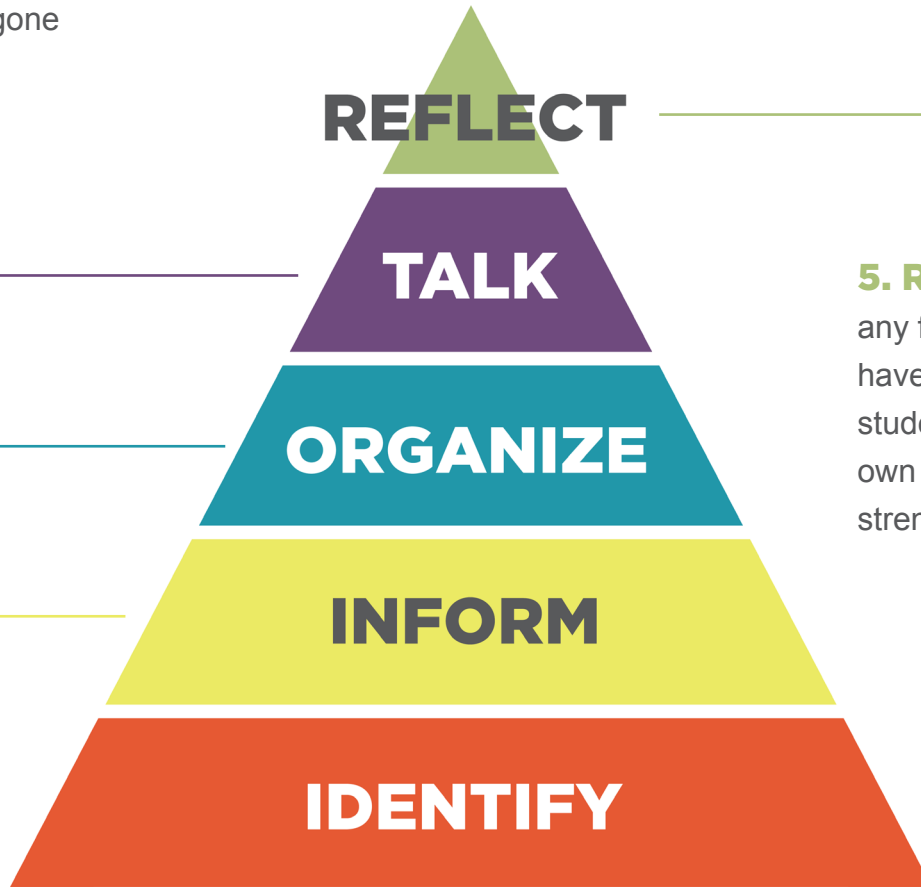
1 While this may not be a requirement for your department or program, it is helpful for the overall assessment of the class session.

2 This includes any concerns about student behaviors, technology issues, etc. Also, if there are teaching strategies that you are using that are specific to the discipline of which the reviewer may not be familiar, provide information to him or her about it ahead of time.

3 This is specifically for the tenure and promotion process.

4 Although most departments and programs have a specific protocol in place for tenure and promotion reviews, it is helpful to solicit the advice of peers when preparing your documents, etc.

5 Think about what comments/ suggestions students have given that have been most useful. How did you incorporate their contributions in the development of your course?

Self-Assessment and Reflection

In the next part of this guide, we will discuss how reflection can be a useful tool when considering your growth as an instructor. Effective teaching not only positively impacts student success and retention rates, but also it is integral to the growth and longevity of disciplinary programs. Teaching observations and regular reflection about instruction should be encouraged and integrated into departmental cultures. When faculty reflect on their teaching, they are better able to identify their areas of strength and areas in which they can grow.

What is "good" self-reflection in the context of a peer evaluation? One benefit to the self-reflection process is that it gives you the opportunity to think about any information that you feel might not be evident during the observation or that might explain what the evaluator may see. Some important questions to consider BEFORE and AFTER the observation(s) might include:

Pre-Observation	Post-Observation
As it pertains to teaching, what do you feel are your areas of strength?	What, in your opinion, were the strengths of the session? What did not work well during the session?
What are some areas in which you would like to grow? How will you actively pursue this growth in the next three years?	If you could change any of the teaching strategies utulized during the session, what would you do differently?
What are the learning outcomes of the session and how will you assess whether students have met those outcomes?	Were the students able to meet the learning outcomes? How did you determine this?
What aspects of the session do you think will be most successful? What parts of the class session will be most challenging? How will you address these challenges?	Given your assessment of the students' learning during the session, what concerns (if any) will you need to address?
In a sentence or two, describe your classroom "culture."	Did you feel that students were engaged during the session?
What would you like the evaluator to know about the class before the observation?	What questions did your students have, and how will you address them?

At times, departments might provide a teaching rubric to assess faculty members' teaching ability. Part of the post-observation reflection process might involve you doing some self-evaluation by assessing your own performance with the rubric. That said, providing the rubric to all faculty in the department communicates clear expectations for good teaching in the content area and provides an additional tool to help faculty engage their own teaching practices. Once observations have taken place and you have had an opportunity to get feedback about your teaching, it is important for both you and the evaluator to identify areas of strength, define opportunities for growth and collaborate on a long-term plan for improvement.

Goal-Setting and Developing a Growth Plan

Once you have done some reflection on the class session, as well as on the feedback from the reviewers, you can now begin the process of setting goals and establishing a growth plan. Although many departments do not require a written growth plan, it can help to ensure ongoing improvement as an educator by establishing a sense of accountability. A good growth plan consists of three main components:

- a set of reasonable goals,
- examples of development opportunities you will pursue to achieve those goals
- names of people or organizations that can help me
- a timeline for completion of the activities listed.

The first step of the process is identifying opportunities for growth. In looking at your feedback from both the reviewers, student evaluations and your own self-assessment, what are some areas in which you would like to improve in your teaching? Once you have identified these areas, look for professional development opportunities, peers and/or professional conferences that can assist you in meeting these goals.

Finally, decide on a reasonable timeframe to complete these activities. This is where prioritizing can be useful. For instance, you might identify some opportunities for growth that are more "urgent" than others. These goals would need to be addressed in the first year rather than during year two. The process of prioritizing can be completed with a peer, your department head or with a staff member at TLI. Working with a "partner" can reinforce a sense of accountability and may provide additional insight about available resources to help you meet your goals. The next page contains a sample form that you can use to draft your growth plan.

We're here to help.

What departmental and campus wide resources (e.g., funding, programs, workshops, peers) are available to assist you in meeting those goals? TLI offers a number of workshops, services and tools to help you think about ways to sharpen your teaching acumen. **For a list of these opportunities, please visit teaching.utk.edu.**

Goals: In what areas of my teaching would I like to improve?	Development Opportunities: What professional development opportunities can I pursue to help me meet this goal?	The Who(s): Who can potentially help me facilitate my growth?	Timeline: By when will I have met these goals?

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