

CONDUCTING PRE- AND POST-OBSERVATION MEETINGS AS PART OF A PEER TEACHING REVIEW

Department of Asian Languages & Literature February, 2011

As a part of the Department of Asian Languages & Literature's Peer Teaching Review process, instructors to be observed may request pre- and/or post-observation meetings. If requested, the observer and instructor arrange these meetings at their mutual convenience. The purpose of these meetings is to enhance the benefit of peer teaching reviews both for the instructor being observed and for the observer, by promoting conversations about teaching among the faculty.

Pre-observation meeting

The main purpose of a pre-observation meeting is for the two faculty members to meet and for instructor to provide relevant information prior to the observation. This both minimizes the potential for misunderstandings and maximizes the potential for the observation to be useful to both the observer and the instructor. In my view, these meetings are most effective if the instructor provides information and does most of the talking, with opportunities also for the observer to share his or her views and to ask questions. For example, it can be helpful for the instructor shares the following sorts of information:

- background of the course, its purpose, and the instructor's own goals
- the instructor's concerns or challenges, as well as innovations and approaches related to the particular course and, if desired, their teaching in general
- anything that the instructor would like the observer to look for or consider during the actual observation
- the lesson plan for the class to be observed (this might be provided later via email)

Effective meetings provide a context for back-and-forth conversation, with the observer asking questions and learning about the course, instructor, and context. These meetings also provide a context to talk about teaching in general and to share teaching ideas.

Post-observation meeting

Like the pre-observation meeting, post-observation meetings are most effective if the instructor provides information and does most of the talking, at least initially. This allows the observer to understand how the instructor views the class that was taught, what went well, what any challenges were, etc. This background is critical in providing context for the observer to understand the instructor's point of view and the instructor's own understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the particular class, since all classes have strengths and weaknesses. Knowing how the instructor views what happened in the class is very beneficial to the observer and helpful in writing up the report.

It is generally effective for the observer to ask the instructor to talk about the class and what happened, about student participation and learning, and for the instructor to talk about his or her own reflections about these things. In my experience, when an instructor talks about his or her own class, I usually learn that the instructor and I share a lot in common in our views of the class—that the instructor’s opinion of what went well concurs with my own, for example, and that the instructor's impressions of problems (difficulties with students, problems with a particular pedagogical technique, etc.) also align with what I saw as areas that seemed to be problematic. Hearing the instructor’s own point of view first provides a context for a non-threatening and productive conversation about these things. It is also helpful for the instructor to ask the observer questions or concerns about the class, and for teaching ideas related to the class. The observer should feel free to share his or her own reflections on the class. The post-observation meeting can also provide a context for talking about the past year’s student evaluations.

Information gleaned at a post-observation meeting can be very helpful in writing up the final report, as the report can now include information about the instructor’s own goals and efforts related to the class and the instructor’s awareness of and efforts toward improving teaching effectiveness. It can also be productive to share the final report with the instructor prior to submitting it, in order to facilitate correction of any errors in the report.

Additional information on conducting peer teaching reviews

Further information on conducting classroom observations for formative (teacher development) or summative (teacher evaluation) purposes are available at a variety of university websites, including the following:

University of Minnesota

<http://www1.umn.edu/ohr/teachlearn/resources/peer/guidelines/>

University of Texas

<http://academics.utep.edu/LinkClick.aspx?link=UTEP+Peer+Observation+Booklet.pdf&tabid=58396&mid=129801>

University of North Carolina

<http://cfe.unc.edu/pdfs/FYC15.pdf>

University of Reading (see p. 7-8 on peer observations)

<http://www.reading.ac.uk/web/FILES/qualitysupport/peerreview.pdf>