



**Center for  
Teaching & Learning**  
*committed to teaching excellence*

# Effective Peer Observation for University Faculty

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# I believe...

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**Teachers Who Love Teaching, Teach  
Children (Students) To Love Learning.**





“Only 10% of your long-term happiness is predicted by your external circumstances, and the other 90% comes from how you teach your brain to process the world.”

Shawn Achor

Happiness Advantage: The Seven Principles That Fuel Success and Performance at Work.

# Agree or Disagree?



## Top of Handout

React to statements by indicating whether you agree or disagree.

# Outcomes of Session

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- ❑ Distinguish between the purposes of formative and summative evaluations in peer review
- ❑ Review effective practices for all three phases of the Peer Observation Process
- ❑ Identify ways to address faculty concerns
- ❑ Discuss ways for effectively utilizing peer observation data
- ❑ Stimulate discussion on Peer Observation of Teaching as a professional development tool

# What is Peer Observation?

- Often referred to as “peer review”, it involves academic colleagues giving and receiving feedback on the effectiveness of teaching practices for promoting student learning (Robinson, 2010).
- Peer review in education in the USA has been traditionally used to provide feedback to individuals on their teaching strengths and areas for improvement.
- The aim is for people to improve their teaching, but may also be used to facilitate management decision making in areas such as; promotion, salary increases and awards.

# Why engage in peer observation?

- Offers a useful supplement to the student perspective on classroom instruction (Trujillo, 2009).
- Peer review is a tool for change (Pagani, 2002). It is a process that provides a method of assessing policies or performances in order to help each other to improve and to ensure standards of teaching.
- Effective practices can be identified and shared.
- Existence of a peer review program in a department or institution signals a commitment to maintaining and raising teaching standards.

# Thought to Consider

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We readily accept that Peer Review in our research and scholarly writing is necessary and beneficial. Why would it not also be just as necessary and beneficial in the teaching aspect of our work?



# What is the Purpose of Peer Observation?

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- **Formative:** improve individual's teaching & student learning
- **Summative:** make personnel decisions

# Models of Peer Observation of Teaching

1. Evaluation model (Summative intent)
1. Developmental Model (Formative intent)
1. Peer Review Model (Formative intent)

(Gosling 2002).


Characteristic	Evaluation	Development	Peer Review
Observer-Observed Relationship	Senior Staff observe - Power	Expert teachers observe - Expertise	Teachers observe each other – equality/mutuality
Purpose	Identify levels of performance, quality assurance,	Improve teaching competencies	Engagement in discussion about teaching; reflection
Outcome	Report/judgement	Report/action plan	Analysis, discussion, wider experience of teaching methods
Inclusion	Selected staff	Selected/voluntary or required	all
Who benefits?	Institution	The observed	Mutual between peers
Conditions for Success	Embedded management processes	Effective central unit	Teaching is valued, discussed
Risks	Alienation, opposition	No shared ownership, lack of impact	Complacency, conservatism, unfocused

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- Peer observation undertaken primarily for developmental purposes can contain evaluative elements, while judgmental schemes might also afford participants the opportunity to develop and learn. Some programs may consciously combine elements of both. Programs may be designed for participants to receive the benefit of formative peer feedback before undergoing a summative assessment (Robinson, 2010).



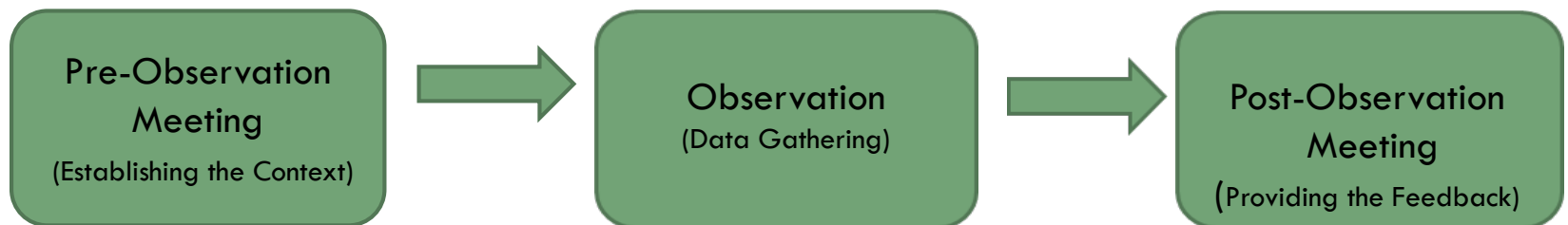
# UNC Charlotte's College of Education Hybrid Model

<http://education.uncc.edu/resources/faculty-resources/peer-observation-teaching-procedures>

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- Peer observation of teaching needs to have a clear structure with agreed purposes, procedures and outcomes, involving suitable preparation, follow-through, and rules of confidentiality.

# Best Practices in Observation

## Three Essential Phases of the Process



(BRENT & FELDER, 2004; CHISM, 2007; HUSTON & WEAVER, 2008)

# Pre-Observation Meeting

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- The pre-observation conference includes the peer observers and the observee. It should occur a few days to a week prior to the scheduled observation.
- The purpose of the pre-observation conference is to set the context for the lesson to be observed.
- Observee should provide an agenda for the class session and the course syllabus. The team should determine which observation guide/feedback form will be used for the observation.



# Discussion Points for Pre-Conference

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- Lesson plan for the session
- Key learning objectives
- Teaching approach or methods being used
- Context of the teaching (room, timetable, the status and history of the student group)
- Aspects of teaching that the observee would like to receive feedback upon

# Thoughtful Selection of Peer Observee

- If you have input about selecting date, course, and observer you will want to make thoughtful decisions
  - Which course should you plan the observation for?
  - What class session/content should you pick?
  - Who is best to provide the peer observation?
- Plan the dates for the preobservation, observation, and post observation meetings all upfront and as early as possible in the semester.

# Observation

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- The classroom observation is conducted during the designated time using the selected observation instrument.
- The observer(s) should be unobtrusive. They should have a place to sit that is out of sight of students but allows them a good visual of both observee and students.
- They should be provided with class materials/handouts that will be used by students.
- Introduce observer to the students and explain the purpose of the observation.

- A key consideration when sending observers into the classroom is they bring to their task an understanding of the sensitivities involved in the process of class visitation, and some knowledge of the variety of learning styles and teaching perspectives encountered in teaching practice. Given adequate institutional preparation in training observers and creating protocols governing the visitation process, POT can be a rewarding experience for all participants concerned.

# Benefits for Observers

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- Many participants find the process of observing more enjoyable, and more beneficial, than the process of being observed (Hammersley-Fletcher & Orsmond, 2004; Costello et al, 2001).
- For observers who lack formal training in the craft of teaching, the opportunity to analyze and discuss the performance of others leads to greater levels of self-awareness as a teacher (Martin & Double, 1998).

# Post-Observation Meeting

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- A post observation conference should be held within a week after the observation.
- It should involve all participants, giving feedback to the faculty member based on the data collected on the observation instrument.
- The observee should be allowed to first share their own thoughts, insights, and analysis of the class session and discuss what they perceived to be strengths and areas of concern of the instruction.

# Post Conference Meeting

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- Constructive criticism is necessary for professional growth so be in the appropriate mindset to ask for and accept it when given.
- Your attitude and your response to feedback will determine if this is a positive professional development experience for you.
- If areas for growth are indicated in the feedback, ask for specific strategies or action steps that the observer would recommend to help you improve in those areas.
- Ask for a copy of the written report/form

# Training of Observers is Needed

- Research reviewed suggests that some training in matters of learning and teaching would be appropriate for all would-be peer observers.
- Identifying different teaching perspectives, providing feedback sheets/criteria for which evaluations should be based increases the observers ability to use useful vocabulary and increase communication with observers and eases observees' fear of unfair evaluation.
- How to provide effective constructive feedback.



# Setting Up For Success: Essential Elements of Peer Observation of Teaching



# In my experience, peer observation is most effective when...

- Overall purpose/outcome is clearly linked to the improvement of teaching and learning
- Observers build a sense of trust, give specific and constructive feedback, “sandwich” constructive comments with positive comments.
- Observees have control and ownership over the experience (based on principles of adult education)
  - Choice of course/date/time
  - Choice over what feedback form/observation protocol is used
  - Opportunity to discuss what they are most interested in receiving feedback on within their practice

# How Should You Use POT Data?

- Build your case for Tenure/Promotion/Contract Renewal
- Clearly demonstrate how you use data (peer observations, student evaluations, self reflections) to establish goals for the continual improvement of your teaching.
- Describe the action steps you have taken and the impact on your practice using the PO data
- It can help support or counter student evaluation data

# Last thoughts from the Literature...

- When Peer Observation of Teaching is incorporated into university practice and culture, and is conducted in a mutually respectful and supportive way, it has the potential to facilitate reflective change and growth for teachers.
- POT must be implemented in a way that fosters a culture of personal questioning, reflection, adaptation, and improvement (Peel, 2005) If it is adopted in a superficial, mechanistic manner, it is unlikely to effect change.

# Questions for Discussion


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- What opportunities does this process provide for you as a faculty member?
- What can you do to make yourself more comfortable with the process?
- How will you utilize this process to help you achieve your professional goals?

# Beyond the Observation: Extending POT to Encourage the Continuous Improvement of Teaching

- Annual Report: Set Goals for developing the teaching agenda based on data from student evaluation or POT
- Teaching Enhancement Plan
- Establishing Additional Low Stakes Opportunities to Observe/Debrief with Faculty: TOP program
- Video-taped Class Session Support

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- Therefore, POT is part of an overall staff development strategy which aims to ensure that individuals are engaging in and learning from, a range of professional development activities.

# Mark - Reappointment

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- I have also learned a lot from my peers about my teaching. Some of the peer feedback I received was to not spend too much time over-processing and to avoid burning myself out by covering too much material. I have taken this advice to heart and have modified my courses to provide the salient material in class and offer resources for continued learning, rather than trying to cover too much.



# Kristen - Reappointment

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Over the past two years, I've realized that my main approach to college teaching involves approaches used in special education – namely direct instruction. Since joining the Active Learning Academy in spring 2015 and observing Drs. Bruce Taylor and Tracy Rock as part of the Peer Observation requirements, I've begun to seek diversity in my approaches to instruction. Specifically, I seek ways to incorporate more problem-based learning and discovery learning in my college classroom. I've noticed increases in student engagement and critical thinking as a result. I will continue to identify content that lends to an indirect instructional approach and to grow my skill at designing and delivering diverse learning opportunities to my students.

# Academics might like POT IF...

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- They have a curiosity about their colleagues' teaching methods and strategies,
- an interest in improving their own teaching effectiveness, or
- feel comfortable being observed in the classroom because they have previously experienced observations (Keig, 2000).

# Academics might resist POT IF...

- They have concerns about the objectivity of the observer or the accuracy and generalizability of what is reviewed,
- They feel that the observation might restrict their academic freedom (Keig & Waggoner, 1995).
- They have never engaged in the process there is often much more skepticism and anxiety associated with it.

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