

PEER OBSERVATION OF TEACHING - GUIDELINES

The Department Chair will coordinate peer observation(s) of teaching for all pre-tenure tenure-track faculty. There should be a minimum of one peer observation per semester. Over the pre-tenure period, peer observations should be conducted across a representative sample of courses taught by the candidate, and should be distributed across different peer observers. Candidates for promotion to Professor must have a minimum of three peer observations of teaching, complete with written evaluation reports, conducted within the three years preceding the application for promotion.

Peer observers will be selected from among the tenured members of the department (and ad hoc department members for small departments or faculty with interdisciplinary or joint appointments). The candidate should provide each peer observer with relevant course materials at least one week prior to the scheduled observation. After observing the candidate, peer observer will write a report, to be given to the candidate and which becomes a part of the candidate's portfolio, and have a conversation with the candidate about their observations. Peer observation reports should include a descriptive account of the observed teaching/learning sample, candid critical analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the candidate's teaching effectiveness (with reference to University standards for teaching, as appropriate), and constructive suggestions for improvement. The candidate has the option to respond to peer observation reports. Peer observation reports and the candidate's responses, if applicable, will be included in the FAR/Librarian Self-Evaluation.

Source: Stetson Tenure and Promotion Policy (adopted 8/27/2010)

OVERVIEW

Peer observation of teaching is required by Stetson's Tenure and Promotion policy. It complements information about teaching effectiveness provided by the faculty member and by students in course evaluations. Faculty colleagues bring a different perspective from students to considerations of the instructor's understanding of the material, the currency and accuracy of course content, the appropriateness of the level of difficulty of the course, and the instructor's methods of instruction. Colleagues are also better able to evaluate course content and learning objectives, and the degree to which they are consistent with the course's role in program or general education curricula.

Perhaps most importantly, especially at universities like Stetson where teaching is at the core of institutional mission, peer observation helps foster the ongoing development of a faculty member's teaching. Toward that end, it is perhaps most useful when it identifies both the relative strengths and weaknesses of the teacher and offers constructive—and specific—suggestions or strategies for improvement.

Peer review brings its own set of challenges: colleagues who observe just one class session may not leave with a representative understanding of that instructor's teaching. The presence of an observer increases the likelihood of an atypical class session. Moreover, different observers of the same class session may focus on different things and interpret what they see differently.

Peer reviewers are encouraged to consider the observation in the context of the course materials provided by the instructor. They are encouraged, as well, to recognize the impact that their presence in the classroom might have on both the instructor and the students. The most effective peer review is

conducted by faculty who recognize that there is no single correct way to teach and who are aware—and able to put aside or explicitly acknowledge—any strong personal or philosophical differences that might impact their evaluation of the work of a colleague.

Peer review is but one component of the system used to assess faculty teaching at Stetson University. Observers (and those observed) should be mindful that a single classroom observation by one person is not, in itself, a reliable indicator of teaching quality. When the various components used to assess teaching correlate, we can be reasonably confident that the conclusions they reveal are accurate. If, on the other hand, the different components (say, teaching evaluations and peer observations) suggest strikingly different conclusions, further investigation and analysis is necessary and should be undertaken by the Candidate and the Department Chair, in consultation with the Dean and other colleagues, as appropriate.

PROCESS

Research on peer review of teaching suggests that the process works best when it is collaborative. It is thus highly recommended that the observation include both a pre-observation and a post-observation meeting. The pre-observation meeting provides an opportunity to discuss the course and the topic/goals for particular class that will be observed; this helps provide context for the observer. The post-observation meeting provides an opportunity to share perspectives, to discuss a draft of the written report, to offer constructive feedback, and to consider strategies for addressing the kinds of challenges we all face in the classroom.

OBSERVATIONS

The peer observation is both descriptive and analytical. During the class (and/or immediately after) the observation, the observer should record specific details and evidence that speak to various aspects of the class session while the experience is still fresh in his/her mind.

Observers will want to consider elements of instruction that have been shown through extensive research to correlate significantly with positive learning outcomes and student motivation to learn:

- (1) Evidence of the instructor's preparedness for the class;
- (2) Evidence of the instructor's knowledge of the material;
- (3) Evidence of the instructor's enthusiasm for the material;
- (4) Whether the instructor spoke clearly, audibly, and confidently;
- (5) Whether the instructor makes effective use of class time;
- (6) The instructor's use of relevant illustrations/examples, as appropriate;
- (7) The instructor's use of the board and/or other visual aids, as appropriate;
- (8) Whether the instructor asked stimulating and challenging questions;
- (9) Whether the instructor held the class's attention;
- (10) Whether the instructor actively involved students, as appropriate; and
- (11) Whether the instructor treated students with respect.

THE REPORT

Peer observation reports should include a descriptive account of the observed teaching/learning session, candid critical analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the candidate's teaching effectiveness (with reference to University standards for teaching, as appropriate), and constructive suggestions for improvement. The candidate has the option to respond to the report. Peer observation reports and the candidate's written responses, if applicable, will be included in the FAR/Librarian Self-Evaluation.

A descriptive account of the observed teaching/learning session should include such information as:

- (1) Description of the classroom atmosphere starting a few minutes before the start of class and extending through a few minutes after the end of class (e.g., number of students present, student activity and interaction, preparation for the class session, etc.);
- (2) The organizational framework for the class session (what happened, how did the faculty member structure the learning);
- (3) The degree, frequency, and quality of student participation;
- (4) The degree, frequency, and quality of student/faculty interaction; and
- (5) Description of sample class segments.

Reports should consider, and provide analytical commentary linked to specific evidence, to general questions such as these:

- (1) What worked especially well in the class?
- (2) What might have been improved?

In considering the relationship of the observation to the course syllabus, peer reviewers may also want to address:

- (1) Whether course content and design reflects current thinking/knowledge in the field;
- (2) Whether course learning objectives are clear and appropriate;
- (3) Whether course policies and procedures are clearly stated; and
- (4) Whether assignments and examinations are challenging and consistent with course objectives.

Sample templates for peer observers are attached to this document. Faculty are not required to use these forms, but they may prove useful to some in preparing for the peer observation. They can be adapted as necessary to different disciplines. Those with questions about how to conduct the peer review are encouraged to speak with their Department Chair, Dean, or the Associate Provost for Faculty Development.

PEER OBSERVATION NOTES

Context or Background: Describe the setting in which the lesson took place, relevant information about the students in the class, and any other descriptive characteristics that would provide appropriate context for the observation.

1: Instructor Goals/Intentions

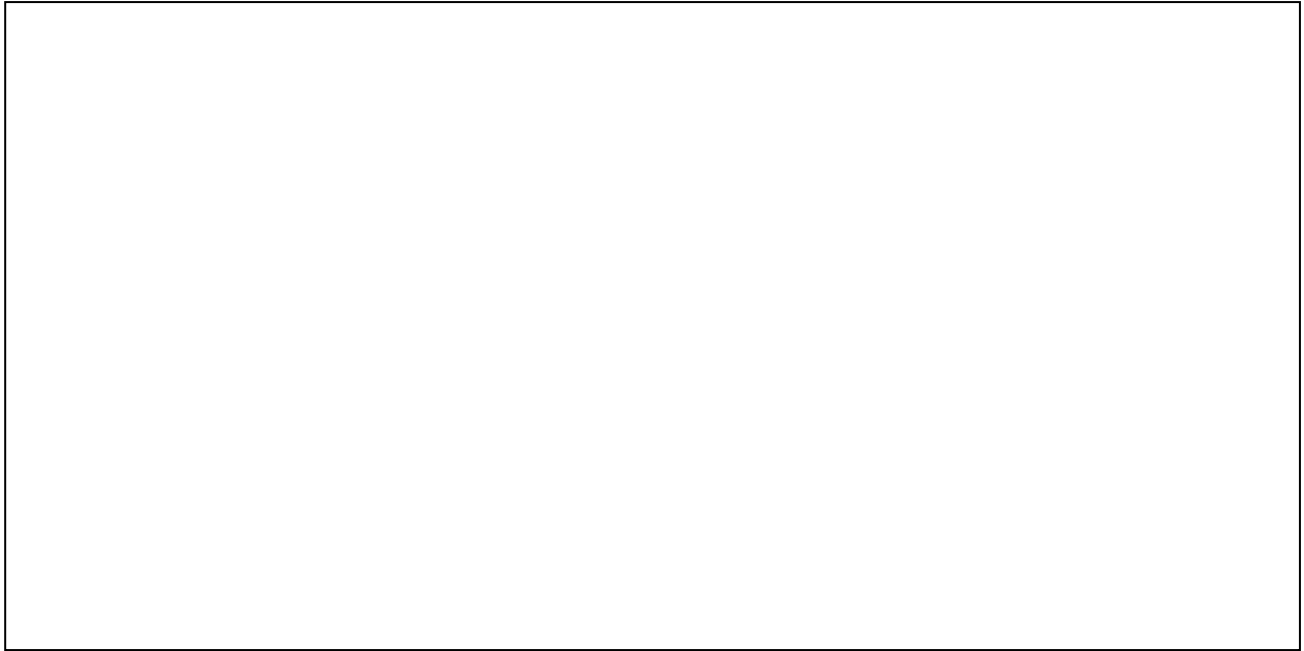
Describe the organizational framework for the class session (what happened, how did the faculty member structure the learning). Focus your analytic comments on whether the goals were 1) clearly stated and understood, 2) appropriate to the focus of the course, and 3) connected to the flow of previous or future classes.

2: Significance of class activities

Describe sample class segments. Focus your analytic comments on whether the tasks performed by students or the topics being discussed 1) are relevant to the focus of the course, and 2) are an effective use of class time.

3: Student engagement

Examine the degree to which student engagement occurred 1) over a substantial portion of the class meeting time, 2) by a broad segment of students attending the class, and 3) in discussion, listening/processing, performing, reading, reflecting, speaking, and/or writing.



4: Student learning

Describe the key strategies employed by the professor in facilitating student learning. Focus your comments on how the instructor developed an understanding of student learning by methods such as 1) questioning students on material, 2) observing student performance(s), 3) student-student discussion, 4) informal assessment techniques, 5) quizzes, and/or 6) other methods.

