

## **GUIDELINES FOR EFFECTIVE PEER OBSERVATION & REVIEW OF TEACHING<sup>1</sup>** **Washington State University College of Veterinary Medicine**

### **I. Peer Observation Teams and Process – Guiding Principles**

- a. Peer colleagues are considered the best judge of the following aspects of teaching: ***subject matter expertise, appropriateness of teaching materials and activities, appropriateness of assessment and grading approaches, and professional behavior of the instructor.***
- b. Formation of peer observation teams provides unique opportunities for helping instructors improve their teaching, for opening discussion among faculty, fostering innovation and best practices in teaching, and providing a more holistic assessment of teaching effectiveness that goes beyond student evaluations.
- c. Request for peer observation will commonly be initiated by individual faculty members seeking peer observation, faculty mentors and/or department chairs.
- d. The faculty member and his/her unit heads are ultimately responsible for the assignment of teams, appointment of a team leader, clarifying the charge to the team, and completion of timely feedback and assessment.

*The peer observation team should consist of three faculty members. One is selected by the faculty member under review, one by the department head, and the third is agreed upon by the two. Departments are encouraged to have at least one faculty member from outside the department included on peer assessment teams. Team members may be tenure track or clinical track faculty.*

- e. Good peer observation programs are built on collegiality and trust, and foster an encouraging and constructive dialogue about teaching. The process is expected to benefit both the faculty member at the center of the review and the members of the peer observation team. In many institutions, participation in the peer observation of teaching processes is a service expectation. In the WSU CVM, peer observation and mentoring efforts will be recognized by department and college leaders as a valued component of a faculty member's teaching activities.
- d. Those selected as "peer coaches" should be comfortable enough with the instructor's teaching content and educational practices to provide useful review on teaching material or methods. Peer observation teams for formative and summative reviews of the same instructor should maintain at least one common observer for continuity but may be expected to change based on available personnel and other reasons. Changes in teams should be made by collaboration of the department head with the faculty at the center of the review as described above.

### **II. Preparation for Peer Observation by Peer Coaches**

- a. To facilitate optimal completion of peer observations, training or orientation sessions for coaches should be provided at the beginning of each semester or academic year.
- b. The charge to the team must clearly identify whether activity is for *formative* (ongoing, explorative, informal improvement) or *summative* (personnel, promotion and tenure, or merit) purposes. Sometimes the activity may be both, notably when a promotion review is imminent. The schedule for these observation periods is flexible, depending on the department and instructor needs. Best practice (if possible) is 2 reviews, the

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Guidelines prepared for the UT College of Veterinary Medicine in 2007 and modified by the Tennessee Teaching and Learning Center at UTK, 2011.

- first primarily for formative purposes and the second for both formative and summative purposes and occurring in closer proximity to promotion review.
- c. The team leader will contact the instructor and set an initial meeting. The observation team should meet with instructor to discuss his/her teaching goals and strategies and to determine if the instructor has particular questions, needs or goals which may be met by peer observations and subsequent dialogue.
  - d. The team should:
    - i. Review the instructor's written teaching philosophy, as well as written goals and learning objectives/outcomes for current courses or lectures/laboratories.
    - ii. Compare instructor's teaching philosophy and goals with the reviewers' to look for potential reviewer bias.
    - iii. Identify any other potential bias or conflict of interest (including positive bias); resolve or withdraw.

### **III. Preparation for Peer Observation – Instructor**

- a. Prepare your Statement of Teaching Philosophy and establish your teaching goals for distribution to the peer observation team.
- b. Gather appropriate teaching materials (see Section IV) and provide them to the peer observation team prior to any classroom observations (ideally in the form of a Teaching Portfolio).
- c. Meet with the observation team as described in Section II.
- d. Well in advance, provide the appropriate times and locations for the peer coaching team to observe your teaching. Choose the settings that will best reflect your efforts and goals.
- e. If an instructor's teaching includes a laboratory, active-learning experience, or clinical teaching, this should be reflected in the observation plans.
- f. Document your past efforts to improve your teaching, and your plans for future/ongoing development as a teacher. (This may be part of a Teaching Philosophy statement or a teaching portfolio.)

### **IV. Review of Teaching Materials by Peer Coaching Team**

- a. Course syllabus
- b. Course and/or Lecture/Lab Learning Objectives(outcomes)
- c. Recommended text(s) or readings
- d. Notes or Handouts
- e. Videos or other teaching aids
- f. Exercises or Assignments, including grading methods and examples of graded material, if applicable.
- g. Examinations, including grading methods and exam statistics (means, medians, SD, grade distribution, etc.).
  - Do instructor's learning outcomes, methods, and assessment align?
  - Is there evidence of rigor?
- h. A description of any innovative teaching activities used or instructor's experiments in teaching. Provide outcomes if the experiment is far enough along to do so.
- i. Articles, grants, proposals, or presentations related to innovative teaching strategies (Teaching Portfolio if available).
- j. *Note:* Quantitative results of student ratings of teaching should not be reviewed prior to the observational peer review (in order to minimize bias). Reviewers may opt to read previous formative reviews to identify areas of change in these cycles, but again not prior to the observation and review.

## V. Observation of the Teaching Event by Peer Observers

- a. Solicit invitations for classroom, clinic, rounds, small group, or other teaching observation opportunities from instructor, and announce visits ahead of time.
- b. Attempt to observe the teaching setting at multiple points in time and in multiple courses (if applicable) including different types of teaching (e.g. lecture, laboratory, case discussion, clinical rounds, etc.).
- c. Prior to observation, discuss with instructor the particular purpose(s) of the teaching you will be observing.
- d. Take sufficient notes to prepare useful dialogue and report (use observation of learners list).
- e. Selected captured presentations may be used for local or external review of teaching, although some elements of classroom environment and engagement may be lost.

## VI. Preparing a Peer Observation Report

- a. Coaches will convene with the instructor to discuss their observations and insights, with anticipation of open and helpful dialogue to promote constructive reflection by the instructor. This feedback discussion should occur as soon after a given observation as possible and be balanced to include both affirmations of practices demonstrated that are working and identification of areas of challenge coupled with suggestions for next steps or resolution (if possible). Peer observation team members will then provide written feedback to the instructor and the team leader.
- b. Peer observation team leader ensures completion of the review, accumulates observer responses, prepares a written summary report, provides other team members an opportunity to respond to the final draft of the report, and reviews the summary report with the faculty member reviewed.
- c. Team leader provides a copy of the written summary report to the instructor and sets a meeting to discuss the observations and recommendations.
- d. Team leader revises report if needed and forwards the final copy to department head, the faculty member observed and the team of peer coaches.
- e. When appropriate, submit report to external reviewer for assessment and comments.
- f. If the report is to be used for summative purposes, the faculty member that was observed has the right to provide a written response to his/her department head.

### Primary Resources

Chism, N. (1999) *Peer Review of Teaching: A Sourcebook*.

Bolton, MA: Anker. *Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education* (Wingspread Conference, 1987).

Bain. *What the Best College Teachers Do* (2004).

Newton, Klein and Mylona. *Becoming an Effective Course Director Workbook* (IAMSE, 2006).

Siddiqui, et al. *Twelve tips for peer observation of teaching*. *Medical Teacher*. 29:297–300 (2007; DOI:10.1080/01421590701291451).

Finn, et al. *How to become a better clinical teacher: A collaborative peer observation process*. *Medical Teacher*., 33:151-155 (2011; DOI:10.3109/0142159X.2010.541534).

Appendix: Supplemental Items

- A. Items Instructors prepare during review
- B. Items Observers prepare during review