

Guidelines for Faculty Peer Observation of Teaching

Section 1. Purpose and Rationale

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley recognizes the essential contribution of its faculty members to the quality of students' education and learning experiences and supports faculty development in all aspects of instruction. The process of formative peer observation provides an effective tool for faculty development in the area of teaching. Departments are encouraged to use this process to engage in constructive conversations between faculty members for the purpose of facilitating faculty growth in the area of teaching, as well as in building healthy collegial relationships through conversation in the context of professional development. This document provides the minimum requirements for the peer observation process to be used by departments in developing their own procedures for peer observation.

The goals of the peer observation process are to improve teaching and student learning while serving as a tool for mentoring. The peer observation process shall foster a culture of teaching excellence through collegial dialogue. Thus, the outcome of the faculty peer observation process shall be a reflective summary by the faculty member describing any steps taken or changes made towards the enhancement of teaching and improvement of student learning.

Section 2. Scope

This policy applies to all full-time faculty whose duties consist of teaching organized courses, including hybrid and online courses, and/or clinical instruction. The policy also applies to full-time faculty who hold administrative appointments at 50% or less.

Section 3. Definitions

Faculty Member – The individual whose teaching is being observed.

Faculty Member Report – A report described below in this policy, written by the faculty member whose teaching is being observed. This document is included in the faculty member's dossier.

Peer Observer – Individual who observes and provides feedback to the faculty member.

Peer Observer Evaluative Report – Oral or written report given by the observer to the faculty member for evaluative purposes. The Peer Observer Evaluative Report is given

to the faculty member only and is not included in the faculty member's report unless the faculty member requests in writing to include the report in the faculty member's dossier.

Peer Observer Summative Report – A written summative evaluation report by a peer observer to be included in the faculty member's dossier; this report only applies to those departments or units in which the majority of the voting members approve to require a summative evaluation of teaching as part of the peer review process.

Department or Unit Faculty – For purposes of this policy, department or unit faculty includes full-time voting members of the department or unit.

Guidelines—Guidelines for the peer observation process developed by department or unit faculty and approved by a majority of the voting members of the department or unit faculty. Guidelines regarding peer observation should be posted in an online location accessible to all faculty.

Section 4. Development of Guidelines

A. Guidelines outlining the peer observation process shall be developed at the department or unit level by the department or unit faculty. The department may, but is not required to, develop and employ summative evaluation criteria separate from the Peer Observation Evaluative Report as part of its peer-review process. If a summative evaluation requirement is developed and approved by the majority of the voting faculty in the department or unit, all faculty in the department or unit shall include the Peer Observation Summative Report in their promotion dossiers. All department or unit guidelines are to be approved by a majority of the voting members of the department or unit. Those departments or units without a specific set of guidelines for peer observation of teaching shall follow the approved institutional guidelines developed by the Office of the Provost and Academic Affairs.

B. Guidelines shall:

1. Focus on faculty development and the mentoring aspects of peer observation;
2. Reflect the variety of instructional delivery methods and topics within each department or unit;
3. Recognize that no single teaching method or approach is inherently superior to any other; and
4. Protect against negative effects caused by conflict or disagreements between colleagues.

C. Guidelines shall specify the following:

1. A timeline for the peer observation process; a recommended timeline is provided below;
2. Whether observation will consist of a single visit or multiple visits to the faculty member's class or lab;
3. Expectations for any pre- or post-observation meetings;

4. Class visits will only occur with prior notification and discussion with the faculty member being observed;
 5. Areas of performance to be included in the observation process for different course formats (lecture, lab, online, hybrid, clinical training);
 6. For courses in which the faculty member conducts both the lecture and lab sections of the course, department guidelines shall specify whether both lecture and lab are to be included in the observation.
 7. If applicable, the details for any summative evaluation criteria developed and approved by the majority of the voting members of the department or unit.
- D. Guidelines shall also make a clear distinction between what is required for the Peer Observer Evaluative Report provided only to the faculty member, and what is required for the Faculty Member Report as described below. Only the latter report is required to be included in the faculty member's dossier unless the department or unit requires otherwise. However, the faculty member may request, in writing, for the Peer Observer Report to be included in the faculty member's dossier. The department or unit may additionally develop a Summative Evaluation Report requirement as part of its peer review guidelines/criteria, which shall be approved by a majority of the voting members of the department or unit faculty. Only in these cases must a Peer Observer Summative Report be included in the faculty member's dossier.

Section 5. Peer Observation Required for Promotion and Tenure

- A. All promotion and tenure review reports sent to UT System must show evidence of peer evaluations of teaching, including faculty members with administrative appointments at 50% or less.
- B. Peer observation of teaching will apply to all full-time faculty.
- C. The decision on whether to include peer observation for review of part-time faculty shall be made at the department or unit level.

Section 6. Frequency of Observation

- A. The following requirements for the frequency of observation may be increased by departments or units, so long as the minimum requirements of peer observation for promotion and tenure cases are met.
- B. Faculty members may request more frequent observation to the extent that can be accommodated by the department or unit.
- C. Frequency of Observation
 1. All tenure-track faculty shall be observed at least once per academic year.
 2. All tenured faculty shall be reviewed at least once every three years.

3. Faculty members with the rank of Lecturer I, Lecturer II, and Lecturer III, or Clinical Instructor, Clinical Assistant Professor, and Clinical Associate Professor shall be observed at least once per academic year.
4. Faculty members with the rank of Senior Lecturer and Clinical Professor shall be observed at least once every three years.

Section 7. Definition of “Peer” for Purposes of Peer Observation and Selection of Peer Observer

Department Guidelines shall specify who can serve as peer observers. Peer observers can be, but are not required to be, members of the same department or unit as the faculty member. The faculty member being observed shall have considerable input into who will serve as his or her peer observer. Observations by non-faculty experts cannot substitute for peer observations.

Section 8. Recognition of the Time and Effort Involved in the Peer Observation Process

The peer observation process involves significant time and effort on the part of the peer observer. Policies shall specify that this important service contribution shall be recognized and reflected in the annual review of the peer observer.

Section 9. Availability and/or Requirements for Training for the Peer Observer

Guidelines shall specify whether there are requirements for training the peer observer. Guidelines shall also direct peer observers to any available opportunities for training, even if not required.

Section 10. Elements of the Faculty Member Report

A. To be included in Faculty Member Report:

1. Name and signature of faculty member
2. Name and signature of peer observer
3. Name and course number of observed class
4. Date of any pre-observation meeting
5. Date of observation(s)
6. Date of any post-observation meeting
7. A narrative written by the faculty member describing what the faculty member has learned from the peer observation process and any plans for improvement or development.

B. Guidelines may specify additional information to be provided to the faculty member by the peer observer in the Peer Observer Evaluative Report, but this information should not be included in the Faculty Member Report. Only the faculty member’s narrative is included in the Faculty Member Report, unless the majority of the voting members of the department or unit approve to additionally require a Peer Observer Summative Report.

Section 11. Timeline

The Faculty Member Report shall be provided to the department chair, unit head or equivalent (or the dean in the event the faculty member being observed is the department chair), no later than the last day of classes for the semester in which the observation takes place. The department chair, unit head, or equivalent (or dean when the faculty member being observed is the department chair), will file the report in the faculty member's dossier.

<i>Timeline</i>	<i>Action</i>	<i>Responsible Party</i>
No later than two weeks prior to first day of class	Provide faculty member with department guidelines	Department chair or unit head or equivalent
No later than the third week of the semester	Identify peer observer and provide name of observer to the department chair	Faculty member
No later than fifth week of the semester	Meet to discuss teaching materials and set date(s) for observation	Faculty member and peer observer
No later than twelfth week of the semester	Peer observation(s)	Peer observer
Within one week of the observation	Post-observation meeting	Faculty member and peer observer
No later than the last day of class	Faculty Member Report provided to chair	Faculty member

Dates Reviewed and Revised

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