5a) Data Collection to Evaluate Faculty Instruction

Best practice in teacher evaluation, like qualitative research, is based on triangulated data. Therefore, we need to gather various perspectives on the quality of a peer’s teaching from a variety of sources. Data should include the perspectives of students, the colleagues, and the individual being evaluated. Evidence can be surveys, observations, artifacts, self-analysis and longitudinal data. Please see Figure 2 below.

Department Personnel Committee’s (DPCs) need to determine how they will weigh each category and what tools they will use as well as how they want to use the data; whether that is formatively for constructive assistance in the development of peer’s teaching skills, and/or summatively for tenure, renewal, promotion and salary decisions.

Figure 2: Types of Data for Teaching Evaluation

*Recommended maximum weight for student evaluations from the CETL Student Evaluation Initiative (SEI). For more information on Student Evaluations, please see the CETL website.
Peer evaluation is a common element of faculty assessment in many academic departments, both at UW—Eau Claire and around the country. Because there are relatively few effective ways to measure teaching performance, it is important that all elements of the process are investigated fully. This report summarizes academic research on peer evaluation as an element in evaluating teaching effectiveness in the college instructional environments. Four general themes emerged from the group’s review of six articles: 1) problems with the use of peer evaluation 2) the relationship of peer evaluation to other elements of evaluation, 3) appropriate uses of peer evaluation, and 4) recommendations for an effective process of peer evaluation. While the topic of evaluation in specific contexts appeared in only one article, it is an area worth discussing because of UW—Eau Claire’s commitment to experiential learning and the variety of instructional contexts, such as labs, studios, field and clinical experiences, etc.

Problems with Peer Evaluation

Most authors are concerned with the reliability of peer evaluation as it is currently practiced. DeZure (1999) notes that although peer evaluation allows access to some information that students cannot provide it is minimally reliable and often significantly biased. Challenges to reliability in peer evaluation may include personal and/or professional conflict between observers and the observed, poor instrumentation, poor implementation (including peer observer lack of training) and inappropriate interpretation of the results (Arreola, 2000; Centra, 1979; DeZure 1999). Several of these challenges are discussed further in the section that outlines the process for improving the peer evaluation process.

Relationship of Peer Evaluation to other Elements of Evaluation

Peer observation is usually a single element in a larger process to evaluate teaching, potentially including student evaluation (see the CETL Student Evaluation Initiative), administrator evaluation, expert consultation, portfolio evaluation and self evaluation (see section Data Collection to Evaluate Faculty Instruction, page 8). DeZure, citing Centra (1993) reports that peer observation is correlated with student evaluations at .55, with colleagues and administrators’ evaluations at .48, with administrators and student evaluations at .39, with colleagues and self-evaluations at .15, and with administrators and self-evaluations at .08. Other authors make specific observations about the relationship between these elements of evaluation.

Peer Evaluation and Student Evaluation. DeZure (1999) maintains that peers are more qualified than students to evaluate some elements of teaching effectiveness, including selection and mastery of course content, course design, instructional and assessment practices, tools and methods, commitment to teaching and concern for student learning, student achievement, support for department instructional efforts and adherence to ethical standards. Centra (1979) observed that students are likely better sources of information on other aspects of teacher performance, including “relationship with students” because they have much greater opportunity to observe the instructor.
Appropriate Uses of Peer Evaluation

Faculty evaluation is often required to serve two different and potentially conflicting purposes—to improve teaching performance (i.e., formative evaluation), and to inform decisions on reappointment, tenure, promotion and merit (e.g., summative evaluation). Because of several of the issues outlined above, Arreola (2000) argues that peer observation should not be used in summative evaluations such as tenure decisions. DeZure (1999) suggests that the use of the information (summative, formative or both) be determined prior to the observation. Although they are unable to link the peer observation program in question to improvements in outcomes, Millis and Kaplan (1995) argue that a model peer evaluation program at University of Maryland University College provides effective formative evaluations.

The TEI group concluded that the line between summative and formative uses of peer observation is often unclear, and agreed that further discussion is needed to understand the proper relationship between the two. Furthermore, the TEI group advises Department Personnel Committees (DPCs) to discuss the use of formative and summative evaluations and to make choices appropriate for their evaluations and departments.

Focus on Process

There is agreement across this selection of literature that a carefully designed and consistently applied process for peer evaluation would improve the reliability and value of observations (Arreola, 2000; Centra, 1979; DeZure, 1999; Mills & Kaplan, 1995). The most common recommendations include careful selection of observers, joint creation of instruments for observation, systematic training of peer evaluators (to conduct observations, to use the instrument, and to norm the evaluators to focus on a group-developed set of criteria), multiple observers and multiple visits, and clear protocol for preparing for, executing, and following up on an observation. Both DeZure and Arreola note that this process should be built on a consensus about what characterizes effective teaching.

Evaluation in Special Contexts

Van Note Chism (2007) suggests that peer observation in laboratory, studio, field settings, clinical settings, service learning, team teaching and case-based settings, as well as Web-based instruction require special attention. Despite this attention to special settings, the author’s advice for effective peer review is similar to more general recommendations found in other sources. She suggests that the observer focus on design, instructions or procedures, instructional oversight, student engagement and assessment.

References


5c) Literature Review of Best Practices in Peer Observation

There is a need for evaluators, departments, or institutions to think about their teaching values, the purpose of the evaluation (Van Note Chism, 2007, 46). Tools to evaluate or observe teaching ought to be developed accordingly. This includes thinking about ways in which specific questions could be misused or misinterpreted as well as thinking about the importance, value, or centrality of the data being sought. Tools for formative and summative assessment may differ in significant ways, so departments ought to think carefully about what the purpose of the observation/evaluation is and how the tools will be used (Van Note Chism, 2007, 47).

TEI members decided that the following categories should be used in order to make the evaluation more consistent with the document on effective teaching developed by TEI members (Working Definition of Effective Teaching):

I. Disciplinary Expertise
II. Design and Development Skills: pre and post discussion
III. Instructional Practices and Performance
IV. Learning/Teaching Environment

Departments will need to strike a balance between efficiency and accuracy – both with the evaluation process as a whole and with forms developed for observation. The literature and group members’ teacher observation knowledge and experiences clearly recommended three event process. The three events are

1. **Pre-observation conference**— A discussion is held between the instructor and observer to share information about the lesson and/or course: objectives of the lesson; learning outcomes for the unit; the class; teaching methods; etc.
2. **Lesson observation**— The observation occurs with standardized forms used to strive for reliability between differing observers and to reduce bias.
3. **Post-observation conference**— The instructor and observer revisit objectives, plans, methods from the pre-observation visit; reflect on observed class; extend reflection to teaching and course design; and determine suggestions for action or resources.
For some departments, designing forms so that the form you write on could be used as the final product or developing electronic forms which reduce additional steps may be one way to gain significant qualitative feedback without losing efficiency.

One best practice noted in several of the readings is that observations guided by an evaluation form tend to be more reliable and useful.

Forms ought to be developed such that space is provided for written statements. Numerical or quantitative claims such as responses to questions involving a rating scale need to be supported by the observer's or evaluator's rationale or evidence.

Another sound practice is using a checklist at the beginning of the form for any routine questions which can be answered with yes/no. Avoiding “rating scales” for questions involving competency instead of variable degree of excellence and for questions which are more appropriately answered using yes/no rather than a sliding scale.

There should be enough openness in the process to allow for tools to be reevaluated or recalibrated to ensure that they work and that they fit the purpose of evaluation. Seldin recommends designing the process with a “safety valve of a built-in feedback to monitor the program” (1999, 214). One potential problem for recalibration is the small sample size and limited diversity of those being evaluated.

TEI members decided that two distinct tools should be developed: one for formative purposes and the other one for summative purposes. The tool for formative purposes would be more descriptive and would include many suggestions while the tool for summative purposes would consist of a rubric with performance levels (see Figure 4).
Figure 4: Observation Rating Scale Equivalencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Exemplary</th>
<th>Exceeds Expectations</th>
<th>Outstanding</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Professional Level</td>
<td>Meets Expectations</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Improvement Required</td>
<td>Below Expectations</td>
<td>Below Average</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Unacceptable/Unprofessional</td>
<td>Does not Meet Expectations</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
</tr>
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<td>Not Applicable</td>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Observers ought to be carefully chosen (Van Note Chism, 2007, 47). Training faculty who will do evaluations in all of the steps of the observation is an important element of the process. Pre-observation and post-observation meetings ought to be part of the process. Both long-term reflections on teaching and short-term intentionality in choosing course materials, developing assignments, and setting up the classroom ought to be essential parts of this discussion. Departments ought to determine the purpose of pre and post meetings, perhaps developing guidelines or a checklist for meetings which is coupled with the purpose of each part. The TEI work group developed some sample forms for these purposes, which can be found on pages 18-28.

Additional Points
Van Note Chism emphasizes the need to be transparent on the extent to which a particular question requires the observer/evaluator to make a judgment call, i.e. whether the term is “low interference” or “high interference.” He cautions, “Generally, it is thought that low inference terms help to make judgments more consistent, but they can fail to capture a holistic sense of what is being judged...” (Van Note Chism, 2007, 53-54).

Arreola provides a useful set of standards and additional clarification of standards for faculty evaluation scale: “exemplary performance, professional level performance, improvement required, unprofessional (unacceptable)” (2000, 46).

Seldin emphasizes the importance of faculty involvement, suggesting, “Faculty members must feel, with justification, that they control their own destiny (1999, 217). Seldin also recommends that groups trying to change current practices in evaluation “hold open faculty forums” and “obtain wide faculty feedback” as well as that they “resist the impulse to develop new forms right away” (1999, 216). Instead, Seldin suggests that it is much more important to survey faculty campus-wide to determine reactions, gain feedback, and assess attitudes, making sure to gain faculty buy-in at every step of the process (1999, 216). Therefore, the TEI work group recommends stakeholders to consider the forms provided as a starting point to begin discussions within units, departments, DPC’s, etc.
Seldin also recognizes that while single forms can be tempting, this may not be suitable for the wide range of courses at an institution (1999, 221).

Resources


5d) Peer Evaluation Guidelines

The Faculty and Academic Staff Handbook (FASH) requires peer evaluations for contract renewal and tenure decisions. Another approach to peer evaluation is for coaching and mentoring colleagues in teaching. We have created a variety of instruments with an eye toward faculty development, which is an ideal goal, and recognize that the instruments we have developed will also be used for important personnel decisions.

The process of evaluating a colleague’s teaching resembles qualitative research. The field observations of the ethnographer observing and taking notes are much like a peer observation of a class. The ethnographer gathers and analyzes artifacts or documents like the peer evaluator would with instructional materials. Interviews are conducted with those observed like the written self-evaluation/reflection on teaching used in peer evaluation. One goal of the ethnographer is to triangulate data from various sources to support his/her findings and increase the validity and reliability of the study.

According to the literature on faculty evaluation, peer observations tend to be highly unreliable and invalid (DeZure, 1999). They tend toward inconsistency between raters, particularly in the absence of standardized tools. Ways to increase reliability of peer observations are to hold a pre-observation discussion with the instructor, employ the same observation tool by all observers, and include a post-observation discussion.

Based on recommended best practices and thoughtful scholarly discussion, the Teaching Evaluation Initiative (TEI) work group has prepared teaching observation tools to assist in data collection:

- a 20-minute pre-observation conference
- an observation form based on the TEI Effective Teaching Working Definition
- a post-observation forms

Although literature sources offered more types of materials evaluation rubrics, we developed two rubrics for evaluating peers’ instructional materials, because these are common instructional materials across campus: syllabuses and assignments.

Best practices for employing self-evaluation narratives as data are also provided on pages 37 and 38.

In sum, the TEI work group sought to develop tools for evaluating peers in myriad settings. These tools are recommended, and we hope that colleagues will flexibly adapt them for use in their specific contexts.

References

20 Minute Pre-Observation Conference

Instructor’s Name: _____________________________  Observer’s Name: _________________________

Discussion Date: ______________________  Course/Topic: __________________________________

Section 2: DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT SKILLS

1. What do you want your students to learn?
   ______________________________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________________________

2. How have you prepared your students to learn this?
   ______________________________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________________________

3. How does this lesson fit with the overall course goals?
   ______________________________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________________________

4. What do you intend to do in this lesson and why?
   ______________________________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________________________

5. What evidence of student learning do you expect to see?
   ______________________________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________________________

6. Is there anything in particular you want me to watch for in this lesson?
   ______________________________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________________________
20 Minute Pre-Observation Conference

Instructor’s Name: _____________________________  Observer’s Name: _________________________

Discussion Date: ______________________  Course/Topic: __________________________________

Section 2: DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT SKILLS

1. What do you want your students to learn?
2. How have you prepared your students to learn this?
3. How does this lesson fit with the overall course goals?
4. What do you intend to do in this lesson and why?
5. What evidence of student learning do you expect to see?
6. Is there anything in particular you want me to watch for in this lesson?
Peer Observation Form

Instructor’s Name: ______________________________     Observer’s Name: ____________________________

Observation Date: ______________________ Course/Topic:  ________________________________________

Rating scale: Exemplary, Professional Level, Improvement Required, Unacceptable/Unprofessional, Not Applicable

Section 1: DISCIPLINARY EXPERTISE

1. The instructor shares knowledge of the field that is up-to-date, relevant, accurate and represents substantial breadth and depth:
   ________________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________________
   Rating: __________

2. The instructor demonstrates procedural skills of a professional within the field:
   ________________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________________
   Rating: __________

Section 2: DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT SKILLS—This section cannot be observed. Please refer to the TEI Pre-Observation Questions.

Section 3: INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES AND PERFORMANCE

3. What teaching methods/instructional strategies do you see being used in the lesson:
   ________________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________________

4. Students participate in the lesson. (Describe the learners’ engagement and involvement):
   ________________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________________
   Rating: __________

5. The instructor stimulates student learning. (Describe the intellectual tasks that are set):
   ________________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________________
   Rating: __________
6. The instructor illustrates concepts or information in meaningful ways, so that learners are encouraged to make connections with other material:

______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________
Rating: __________

7. The instructor guides learner thinking, monitors learner progress, and gives feedback:

______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________
Rating: __________

Section 4: LEARNING AND TEACHING ENVIRONMENT

8. The instructor is an effective communicator:

______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________
Rating: __________

9. The lesson is organized which contributes to student learning:

______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________
Rating: __________

10. The instructor creates an environment conducive to student learning (i.e., fair, respectful, and welcoming):

______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________
Rating: __________

Overall Comments:
Observation Rating Scale Equivalencies

<table>
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<th>Scale</th>
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<td>Below Expectations</td>
<td>Below Average</td>
</tr>
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<td>Unacceptable/Unprofessional</td>
<td>Does not Meet Expectations</td>
<td>Poor</td>
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<td>Not Applicable</td>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Peer Observation Form
Instructor’s Name: _____________________________ Observer’s Name: _____________________________
Observation Date: ______________________ Course/Topic: _____________________________________

Rating scale: Exemplary, Professional Level, Improvement Required, Unacceptable/Unprofessional, Not Applicable

Section 1: DISCIPLINARY EXPERTISE
1. The instructor shares knowledge of the field that is up-to-date, relevant, accurate and represents substantial breadth and depth:
   Rating: __________

2. The instructor demonstrates procedural skills of a professional within the field:
   Rating: __________

Section 2: DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT SKILLS—This section cannot be observed. Please refer to the TEI Pre-Observation Questions.

Section 3: INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES AND PERFORMANCE
3. What teaching methods/instructional strategies do you see being used in the lesson:

4. Students participate in the lesson. (Describe the learners’ engagement and involvement):
   Rating: __________

5. The instructor stimulates student learning. (Describe the intellectual tasks that are set):
   Rating: __________
6. The instructor illustrates concepts or information in meaningful ways, so that learners are encouraged to make connections with other material:

Rating: __________

7. The instructor guides learner thinking, monitors learner progress, and gives feedback:

Rating: __________

Section 4: LEARNING AND TEACHING ENVIRONMENT

8. The instructor is an effective communicator:

Rating: __________

9. The lesson is organized which contributes to student learning:

Rating: __________

10. The instructor creates an environment conducive to student learning (i.e., fair, respectful, and welcoming):

Rating: __________

Overall Comments:
# Observation Rating Scale Equivalencies

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<td>Below Average</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Unacceptable/ Unprofessional</td>
<td>Does not Meet Expectations</td>
<td>Poor</td>
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</table>
Post Observation Conference

Instructor’s Name: _____________________________  Observer’s Name: _______________________________

Discussion Date: ______________________  Course/Topic: __________________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observer’s Comments</th>
<th>Instructor’s Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</table>

Suggestions

Instructor’s Action Plan
University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire  
Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL), Teaching Evaluation Initiative (TEI)

Post Observation Conference
Instructor’s Name: ________________________________  Observer’s Name: ____________________________

Discussion Date: ______________________  Course/Topic: ___________________________________

Observer’s Comments

__________________________________________________________________________

Suggestions

__________________________________________________________________________

Instructor’s Action Plan
Post Observation Conference

Instructor’s Name: _______________________________  Observer’s Name: _______________________________

Discussion Date: ____________________________  Course/Topic: ________________________________

Instructor’s Comments

Suggestions

Instructor’s Action Plan