Recommendations for Peer Observations

Peer observations are an important aspect of evaluating teaching effectiveness, and provide an opportunity for continuous faculty development (CBA Article 12)[1]. As student ratings focus on the learner's perspective, and are subjective to cultural and social biases, they represent a single datum, and ideally "a combination of all appropriate data will be used to give sufficient evidence" of the different aspects of teaching effectiveness (Article 12.B.1.b). Effective peer observations help fill this gap and provide insights beyond student evaluations of data and can provide additional information regarding students' perceptions of the Instructor.

In this document we offer recommendations for conducting peer observations during the COVID-19 global pandemic to ensure that they remain fair to instructors and are in line with CBA policies. In this document, different modalities used by faculty for instruction during the Fall 2020 semester are reviewed, and guidelines for observing synchronous and asynchronous course modalities are suggested. These are recommended guidelines, rather than a mandate, and are made with the goal of supporting collegial, insightful, and effective peer review observations. The shift to online and remote teaching presents a challenge as teaching modalities have changed during the COVID-19 global pandemic, which in effect has also changed how observations must be conducted. Additionally, some of the courses moved to remote modality were not intentionally scheduled in this format, and the change in modality likely involved significant preparation by faculty.

We recognize that there is no "one size fits all" approach to instruction, and similarly there is not a one size fits all approach to peer observations. In recommending these guidelines, we encourage faculty to use a flexible, collegial and cooperative approach towards peer observation, with a focus on faculty development. Peer observations represent one source of data that can be used in faculty evaluation and performance reviews. It is important for there to be common understanding between the observer and observed faculty members, and for this data to be presented and discussed in a way that is both insightful and transparent for later reviewers and evaluators during the faculty evaluation process.

Fall 2020 Instructional Modalities
WCU professors embrace principles of quality instructional design and active learning in their daily lessons whether they are teaching in a face-to-face or remote learning environment. Active learning practices such as question and answer, writing-revision, problem-solving, group work, or authentic exploration may look different in an online classroom where students are not physically with the professor and their classmates.[2] The four main instructional modalities being used in the Fall 2020 semester are as follows:

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[1] The full 2019-2023 Collective Bargaining Agreement is available on the APSCUF website here: https://www.apscuf.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/FacultyCBA2019-23final.pdf
[2] For additional information on course delivery and modalities during Fall 2020, please see the COVID-19 Student FAQ: https://www.wcupa.edu/healthNotices/studentFAQs.aspx

- *Online*: these courses were originally scheduled in an online format, and the modality was not changed due to COVID-19 and remote learning
- *Hybrid*: these courses contain some face-to-face component. The faculty member has likely had to adjust their instructional methods, to adhere to WCU policies, especially with respect to COVID-19 related procedures.
- *Remote Synchronous*: these courses were originally scheduled in a face-to-face format, and the modality was adjusted to allow the faculty member to host online Zoom lectures live in real time at the same time and frequency as originally scheduled.
- *Remote Asynchronous*: asynchronous delivery instructional methods may include prerecorded video lessons and a wide variety of instructional interactions including but not limited to such methods as email, online discussion boards, and breakouts.

Overview of Peer Observation Process

Peer observations are intended to assist in the professional development of faculty. They may provide an opportunity for the observer and observed faculty member to reflect and exchange ideas related to teaching performance and effectiveness. For the Fall 2020 semester, we expect that most classroom visitations will occur remotely. If both the observer and observed faculty are mutually agreeable, and there is no evidence of coercion by other party, there is an opportunity for face-to-face peer observations that adhere to all WCU policies and procedures, especially those that are related to the COVID-19 global pandemic. If an observed faculty member would like to have a peer observation of their in-person learning activities, attempts should be made to provide opportunities for the observer to complete the observation remotely through the use of technology, such as allowing the observation of the activities via Zoom or a recording.

A classroom visitation, a post-meeting, and a written peer observation are all contractually required components of the evaluation process (Article 12). Prior to putting a classroom visitation evaluation in writing, there shall be a discussion of the observation process with the faculty member (Article 12.C.1.b.2). We recommend that all peer observations include three main components in the process: a pre-meeting, the class visitation, and a post-meeting[3].

1. ***Pre-meeting***: both faculty members should establish goals for the observation and useful background information should be provided to the observing faculty. It is helpful to discuss relevant issues to the course, and to review the syllabus, course outline, handouts, and other pertinent documents. The observer should familiarize themselves with the course description, learning objectives, assigned activities and assessment. For remote asynchronous or online class visitations, the observed and observing faculty should find a mutually agreeable time to meet and review the course learning materials and module. It would be helpful to make the scope of these materials similar to an in-person face-to-face classroom visitation. Both faculty can use a shared screen and videoconferencing in order to review documents and the class materials, offering the observed faculty to demonstrate their teaching effectiveness to the observing faculty.

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[3] Attached is one example of the peer observation process used by WCU faculty.

It may be helpful for this meeting to include an initial conversation between the observer and the observed faculty. Faculty may want to orient this conversation around questions and topics, such as the following:
- How can this process be most useful for you?
- Is there anything specific you would like to focus on?
- Are there things you'll be trying for the first time in this session?
- How would you describe this group of students?
- Are there materials that I can look at ahead of time that will help me understand what I will be watching when I come to observe?

2. ***Classroom Visitation***: the observer should take notes that include specific examples, as well as broader reflections of the class and the observed faculty member. The observing faculty member should not participate, interrupt, or interfere with the class, and should approach the observation process with an open mind and limited bias. The observer's notes should include references to the faculty members preparation and delivery of learning materials, student engagement, and overall experience of the class.

3. ***Post-meeting***: the observer and observed faculty should use this time for both parties to debrief, discuss strengths and weaknesses of the classroom experience, and reflect on opportunities related to professional development and teaching performance. This meeting should include discussion of the overall observation process, and evaluate if the goals set within the pre-meeting were achieved. The observer should provide an opportunity to their peer colleague to reflect on the overall observation process and identify any areas that could be focused on in the future. It may be helpful to ask questions to the observed faculty at this time, such as the following:
- How do you think things went overall?
- Was there something you felt went especially well?
- Was there something that surprised you?
- What worked or didn't work: what made you think so, and why do you think that happened?
- I noticed ____ and am curious what your experience of that was. . .

Effective Peer Observation Practices
The peer observation process should be comprised of informal data and reflections collected during the classroom visitation, as well as the organization of these notes afterwards into a written summary focused on the professional development of the observed faculty. We encourage departments to meet, discuss, and identify peer observation practices and approaches that are effective and reflective of their own discipline.

We reference samples of existing WCU department peer observation templates below as well as including them in as reference materials[4]. As examples, these peer observation templates will not meet the needs of every department. Departments should feel free to modify these examples using a collegial approach to meet the needs of their department within the suggested guidelines. For departments that have previously approved peer observation processes or instruments, we recommend that these procedures and information be reviewed to make sure they reflect the current circumstances and context of the COVID-19 global pandemic.

The below list represents additional practices that may be incorporated into the peer observation process:

- ***Reflective Summary:*** To make the observation useful and put the results into practice, we suggest that the observed faculty member compose a written reflective summary of the experience, responding to questions such as:
  - What was the most useful part of this experience for you?
  - What specific things got reinforced as effective during this process?
  - What specific changes do you envision as a result of this feedback?
  - Did you learn anything new about your students or how they learn? (e.g. syllabus/course design, assignments, exams/quizzes)

- ***Quantitative Criteria***: these criteria focus on obtaining data on specific dimensions via numerical ratings or checklists, indicating the extent to which the observed faculty met expectations regarding a specific performance dimension. Example items from WCU Psychology Department:

AREA OF EVALUATION	N/A	Improvement needed	Meets standards	Exceeds Standards
Organization & Preparation				
Presentation & Materials				
Enthusiasm				
Encourages Critical Thinking				
Use of Visual Aids & Technology				
Content/Command of Subject				
Poise and Confidence				
Clear Relevance of Content				
Inclusion of Current Research, etc.				
Appropriate Level				
Interaction & Rapport with Students				
Encourages Class Participation				
Open to different opinions				
Recognizes Student Difficulty				
Responsive to Student Questions, etc.				
Overall Teaching Skills				

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[4] The peer observation forms and templates referenced in this section from the WCU Departments of Philosophy, Psychology, and Public Policy and Administration are included as reference documents. As examples, they will not meet the needs of every department. Departments should feel free to modify these examples using a collegial approach to meet the needs of their department within the guidelines provided above.

- ***Qualitative Criteria***: these criteria focus on obtaining data on specific dimensions via open ended comments. Example items from WCU Philosophy Department:

  a) Briefly describe the objectives of the class visited (the plan for the class that day).

  b) Describe the method(s) of instruction used and the organization of the material presented to the class. (The observer will note if the instructor connects theoretical with applied knowledge.)

- ***Combination of Quantitative and Qualitative Criteria***: it is often effective to include a combination of qualitative comments and quantitative data regarding specific performance dimensions. Example items from WCU Public Policy and Administration Department:

  Organization/Course Set-Up (This includes clear presentation of D2L course website as well as clear presentation of assignments and expectations.)

  ☐ Excellent
  ☐ Good/above average
  ☐ Satisfying/average
  ☐ Needs improvement/below average
  ☐ Inadequate

  Comments:

  Interaction (This may include emails, announcements, feedback on assignments, and discussion board activities. Synchronous sessions are not required, but may be included as a form of interaction)

  ☐ Excellent
  ☐ Good/above average
  ☐ Satisfying/average
  ☐ Needs improvement/below average
  ☐ Inadequate

  Comments: