

Teaching Observation of Instruction

Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL)

Context:

Gathering and assessing evidence of instructional effectiveness is critical to our growth and impact as teachers. From a developmental standpoint, we learn from our experiences in the classroom and seek to adapt and adopt instructional innovations in a genuine effort to engage and enhance learning. In doing so, we benefit from the input of others. Indeed, the primary sources of information central to critically reflective pedagogy include students (and therefore student evaluation of instruction) and our colleagues (teaching evaluation of instruction). This document presents a method of teaching observation that is at once formative and summative. It is designed to facilitate the professional growth and development of faculty in a climate of trust and fairness according to criteria representative of the many facets of effective instruction and observation.

Purpose:

While there is a general consensus on the value of teaching observation, there also exists a need for a guiding set of principles and practices designed to facilitate process. In an effort to help our colleagues at all levels evaluate instruction fairly and formatively, and to yield results that can simultaneously improve instruction and inform assessment, the following Teaching Observation of Instruction Form has been developed by CETL. It represents evidence-based practices drawn from the literature, empirically validated efforts of other institutions and, importantly, the input and interests of our own academic community.

Practice:

As with any assessment of instruction, Teaching Observation must be understood and exercised with sensitivity to the context of the class, the curriculum, and the larger teaching and learning process. Teaching Observation must recognize a number of factors that may influence the observed session, the class climate, and the learning environment itself. Evaluators must do more than simply observe; they must learn about the class, the instructor's teaching philosophy and methods, and learning goals. They must communicate effectively and constructively with the colleagues they are evaluating prior to and after the session, and during the session they must be genuinely present. Specifically, *as a process*, teaching observation is divided into three steps: the pre-observation visit, the class observation, and the post-observation meeting. For each step there exists a number of evaluative criteria and, *as a practice*, evaluators are encouraged to be mindful, attentive, engaged, and observant.

The following forms look detailed, but evidence shows that with just a little experience, good observation practices become second nature and enriching to the observed and the observer alike. *Additional information, strategies, and support are available the CETL.*

The Pre-Observation Meeting

When: One week prior to the class session

Why: Enables observer to establish a human connection; to discuss the class and climate, the topic and the learning environment; to review materials; to share expectations, interests, and obstacles. As the following forms indicate, it is critical to carefully review the observed faculty member's syllabus and relevant documents through a learning-centered prism. Does the syllabus clearly articulate the course content and its significance, student learning outcomes and the methods of accomplishing them, expectations of student engagement and dominant instructional approaches? Do the materials (assignments, exercises, presentation slides, etc.) serve the particular learning objective for both the class and the session? Are they written for the observer, the faculty, or the student? *Information on learning-centered artifact assessment is available through the CETL.*

How: Conversational tone. Listen. (CETL can provide excellent scholarly materials on listening, which is more challenging, yet vital, than it appears). Exercise empathy. Recall what it feels like to be evaluated and observed. Faculty may be nervous, even defiant; it is therefore essential to establish a climate of trust and inquiry. Make it clear that the goal is not necessarily to look for problems but to discover and develop pedagogical strengths. While conducting the pre-observation meeting, please refer to questions but don't come across as scripted and don't "checklist" behavior. Make notes and return to the forms after the meeting concludes. *The CETL maintains an inventory of evidence-based best practices designed to accomplish various and different learning goals within and across the curriculum, and practical advice on conducting these meetings. Please contact Brian if you have any questions.*

Pre-Observation Toolkit

Request and review the syllabus and any class/session-specific information and documents the instructor may wish to provide.

Artifact Assessment:

1. Does the syllabus clearly articulate the course content and its significance (the "why should I take this class?" question) in terms that are relatable to the student?
2. Are student learning outcomes clearly articulated?
3. Are methods of accomplishing student learning outcomes discussed?
4. Are the expectations of student performance and engagement clearly explained?
5. Is there a statement about "how the class will be taught and why?", and is compelling?
6. Do the assessments (assignments, exercises, etc.) serve the particular learning goals for the class and the specific class session?

Pre-Observation Meeting Framing:

1. Tell me about the class.
2. How is it going?
3. What's working, what's not?
4. Note number of students
5. Note faculty member's perception—and you assessment—of the learning environment.

Pre-Observation Guiding Questions:

1. What is the topic of the observed session?
2. How does it fit in the context of the course itself?
3. What are the goals for the class that I will observe?
4. What are your plans for achieving them?
5. What teaching/learning activities will take place? Why?
6. What have students been asked to do in preparation for this class?
7. Is there anything in particular you would like me to focus on during the observation?
8. Is there anything in particular about the class, the students, the methods, or the environment that I should be mindful of during the class session?

The Class Observation

When: Scheduled in consultation with the instructor at least 3-4 weeks in advance and conducted approximately a week after the Pre-Observation Meeting. Timing is critical: avoid “too early,” “too late,” and “right around midterm” scheduling dilemmas, for example.

Why: To genuinely see and experience the faculty member’s learning environment and the teaching/learning/engagement practices at work in the class. To foster and encourage confidence, growth and innovation; to learn from peers; to supplement student evaluation data; to triangulate critical introspection based on input; to provide both formative and summative feedback critical to a faculty member’s career advancement, teaching effectiveness, and student learning opportunities.

How: Be present and engaged. Do not “checklist” behavior in inspection form fashion or otherwise contaminate the learning environment. Observers should familiarize themselves with the evaluative criteria and discreetly observe the class accordingly. As the Toolkit and Observation Form that follow indicate, there are four key areas to be mindful of: Preparation and Organization, Teaching Strategies and Presentation/Engagement Skills, Content Knowledge, and Classroom Climate.

Class Observation Toolkit

Below are the four evaluative domains pertinent to the class observation. Be mindful of these factors as you complete an observation, but do not “check off” items; rather, maintain a teaching observation record in which you can discreetly note observations in each area.

Preparation and Organization:

1. Did the instructor arrive prepared and organized for class?
2. Were the learning goals for the session clearly articulated?
3. Were presentation materials integrated effectively?
4. If technology was used, was it used effectively? If technology was not used, could it have contributed to the quality of the class?
5. Was class time used efficiently and effectively?
6. Did the instructor stay on task?

Teaching Strategies and Presentation/Engagement Skills:

1. Did the instructor stick to the game plan articulated in the pre-observation meeting? If not, was it for a suitable purpose? Explain.

2. Were the teaching strategies appropriate for the course content?
3. Did the teaching strategies help students accomplish articulated learning goals?
4. Were the strategies deployed confidently?
5. Were the strategies deployed successfully?
6. Did the students “buy-in?”
7. Did the instructor maintain an engaged learning environment? If attention lagged, note when and potentially why.
8. Did the instructor respond effectively to student questions?
9. Did the instructor respond effectively to student non-verbal cues?
10. Did the instructor provide evidence of efficacy?
11. Did the instructor project his/her voice adequately?
12. Did the instructor use nonverbal behavior –gestures, eye contact, etc.—effectively?
13. Did he/she convey enthusiasm for the subject matter and student participation?
14. Did the instructor use the classroom space effectively?
15. Did the instructor conclude the class with a sense of accomplishment and a clear indication of how to prepare for the next class session?

Content Knowledge

1. Did the instructor demonstrate a command of the material he/she was presenting?
2. Did the instructor contextualize formal knowledge (e.g., readings, facts, figures) and use examples in ways that helped students comprehend complex points?
3. Did the instructor effectively and efficiently distinguish between major and minor points?
4. Did the instructor successfully match his or her content mastery with the course level?

Class Climate and Learning Environment:

1. Scheduling: Is the time of the class optimal for accomplishing the learning goals associated with it?
2. The Environment:
 - a. Is the class type (face-t-face, online, hybrid) compatible with the learning goals?
 - b. Is the classroom suitable for the class and the instructor’s teaching style?
 - c. Is the layout optimal for student engagement and active learning?
 - d. Is the technology appropriate for the learning goals associated with the class?
 - e. Is access an issue for the instructor or the student?
 - f. Are there any environmental/location-based distractions?
3. Was the class climate positive?
4. Did the students generally come to class prepared?
5. Did the students maintain a suitable level of interest and engagement?
6. Did the students respond appropriately to the instructor’s methods?
7. Did the students respect the instructor’s authority in the classroom?
8. Referring back to the pre-observation materials and discussion, does the student population (majors/non-majors, course level and student level, etc.) compliment or detract from accomplishing the course goals?

The Post-Observation Meeting

When: One week after class observation

Why: To provide well organized and meaningful feedback and to discuss alternatives and solutions as necessary. To challenge and inspire the instructor to keep up the good work or to focus on areas where innovation may be in order. Consider option-mapping with the instructor. Remember to exercise the same conversational and developmental tone present in pre-observation meeting.

How: Meet 1:1. Begin conversationally, thanking the instructor for the opportunity to observe his or her class. Share Observation Form and discuss results in a formative and positive fashion. Ask questions, record responses. Encourage self-evaluation; consider a “cognitive wrappers” model. (Available through CAFÉ).

Post-Observation Toolkit

Ask instructor to complete a self-assessment with reference to –but not in lock-step with—the observation form items after the observation and before the post-observation meeting.

Begin conversationally.

Maintain a formative/developmental focus and tone.

Post-Observation Guiding Questions

1. Overall, how do you think the class session went?
2. In hindsight, was this a typical class session?
3. Do you think this was a fair representation of a day-in-the-life of your class?
4. What were your strengths?
5. Any weaknesses?
6. Reflecting on the class, are there any things you would have or could have done differently?

Share your observation and discuss key findings. Solicit feedback on them. Share options and alternatives for innovation. Develop an option map for change, if necessary. Take seriously the answers to the questions in this last section, add them to the overall assessment and if necessary, reassess your own evaluation in light of the responses from the observed faculty member. Consider asking the faculty member for an update on any changes adopted in light of the observation.

Next: Documentation

*Please use the attached **Teaching Observation Forms** to help guide you through each stage of the process. And to avoid the “checklist” problem, please consider using a teaching observation record, which will guide your assessment after the observation and to inform the completion of the observation form.*

Pre-Observation Meeting Form

Instructor Name:	Observer Name:
Class:	Pre-Ob Meeting Date:
Department:	College:

Artifact Assessment			
	Yes	No	Comments
Does the syllabus clearly articulate the course content and its significance (the “why should I take this class?” question) in terms that are relatable to the student?			
Are student learning outcomes clearly articulated?			
Are methods of accomplishing student learning outcomes discussed?			
Are the expectations of student performance and engagement clearly explained?			
Is there a statement about “how the class will be taught and why?”, and is compelling?			
Do the assessments (assignments, exercises, etc.) serve the particular learning goals for the class and the specific class session?			

Pre-Observation Framing Questions:

1. Tell me about the class.

2. How is it going?

3. What’s working, what’s not?

4. Note number of students

5. Note faculty member’s perception –and you assessment—of the learning environment.

Pre-Observation Guiding Questions		
	Please comment on the instructor’s responses and plan for the intended class session.	Post-Observation Reflection (relate observed to intended. Did the class follow/address the instructor’s intent?)
	Pre-Observation Comments	Post-Observation Comments
What is the topic of the observed session?		
How does it fit in the context of the course itself?		
What are the goals for the class that I will observe?		
What are your plans for achieving them?		
What teaching/learning activities will take place? Why?		
What have students been asked to do in preparation for this class?		
Is there anything in particular you would like me to focus on during the observation?		
Is there anything about the class, the students, the methods, the environment that I should be mindful of during the class session?		

Class Observation Form

Instructor Name:	Observer Name:
Class:	Pre-Ob Meeting Date:
Department:	College:

Preparation and Organization		
	0 = No Evidence 1 = Minimal 2 = Appropriate 3 = Exceptional	Comments
Did the instructor arrive prepared and organized for class?		
Were the learning goals for the session clearly articulated?		
Were presentation materials integrated effectively?		
If technology was used, was it used effectively?		
If not, could it have contributed to the quality of the class?		
Was class time used efficiently and effectively?		
Did the instructor stay on task?		

Teaching Strategies and Presentation/Engagement Skills		
	0 = No Evidence 1 = Minimal 2 = Appropriate 3 = Exceptional	Comments
Did the instructor stick to the game plan articulated in the pre-observation meeting?		
Were the teaching strategies appropriate for the course content?		
Did the teaching strategies help students accomplish articulated learning goals?		
Were the strategies deployed confidently?		
Were the strategies deployed successfully?		
Did the students “buy-in?”		

Did the instructor maintain an engaged learning environment		
Did the instructor respond effectively to student questions?		
Did the instructor respond effectively to student non-verbal cues?		
Did the instructor provide evidence of efficacy?		
Did the instructor project his/her voice adequately?		
Did the instructor use nonverbal behavior –gestures, eye contact, etc.—effectively?		
Did he/she convey enthusiasm for the subject matter and student participation?		
Did the instructor use the classroom space effectively?		
Did the instructor conclude the class with a sense of accomplishment and a clear indication of how to prepare for the next class session?		

Content Knowledge		
	0 = No Evidence 1 = Minimal 2 = Appropriate 3 = Exceptional	Comments
Did the instructor demonstrate a command of the material he/she was presenting?		
Did the instructor contextualize formal knowledge (e.g., readings, facts, figures) and use examples in ways that helped students comprehend complex points?		
Did the instructor effectively and efficiently distinguish between major and minor points?		
Did the instructor successfully match his or her content mastery with the course level?		

Class Climate and Learning Environment		
	0 = No Evidence 1 = Minimal 2 = Appropriate 3 = Exceptional	Comments
Is the time of the class optimal for accomplishing the learning goals associated with it?		
Is the class type (face-to-face, online, hybrid) compatible with the learning goals?		
Is the classroom suitable for the class and the instructor's teaching style?		
Is the layout optimal for student engagement and active learning?		
Is the technology appropriate for the learning goals associated with the class?		
Is access an issue for the instructor or the student?		
Are there any environmental/location-based distractions?		
Was the class climate positive?		
Did the students generally come to class prepared?		
Did the students maintain a suitable level of interest and engagement?		
Did the students respond appropriately to the instructor's methods?		
Did the students respect the instructor's authority in the classroom?		
Referring back to the pre-observation materials and discussion, does the student population (majors/non-majors, course level and student level, etc.) compliment or detract from accomplishing the course goals?		

Post-Observation Form

Instructor Name:	Observer Name:
Class:	Pre-Ob Meeting Date:
Department:	College:

Post-Observation Meeting: Guiding Questions

1. Overall, how do you think the class session went?
2. In hindsight, was this a typical class session?
3. Do you think this was a fair representation of a day-in-the-life of your class?
4. What were your strengths?
5. Any weaknesses?
6. Reflecting on the class, are there any things you would have or could have done differently?

Overall Formative Evaluation

In the space provided, please provide a formative/developmental assessment of the instructor's teaching based on the pre-observation meeting and materials, the class observation, and post-observation meeting. It is entirely appropriate to comment on changes since the prior observation, as well as specific recommendations for change, growth, innovation, or stability.

Final thoughts:

- For a long class (e.g., a night class), should the observer stay the entire class period?
 - Decide with the instructor the portion of the class to be observed, the necessary duration of the observation, and the reasons why.
- How do you observe adjunct faculty?
- What about online classes? Feedback and ideas? Talk to Brian.
- Use the teaching observation record to inform and complete the classroom observation forms.
- Focus on the formative with the faculty member.
 - Encourage faculty to respond to the feedback and demonstrate usage of it in their critical self-reflections of teaching effectiveness and growth.
- Summatively, avoid quantification and use the information gathered from these forms to document teaching effectiveness, growth, change, and faculty response over time.