



Faculty Peer Observation

Process Overview

Purpose and Objectives

Northwest's Peer Observation system is designed to be a collaborative activity providing a professional development opportunity for all participants and, therefore, promoting excellence in teaching. The process is intended to serve as a formative assessment highlighting individual strengths as well as areas which could be enhanced. More simply stated, the idea is for the person being observed to obtain feedback which is meaningful and constructive while also prompting the observer to reflect on his or her practice.

Process Overview

The Faculty Peer Observation process includes seven steps:

- (1) Orientation session (optional for those who have already participated in peer observation at least once in the past) – Learning and Teaching Center staff discuss the process with all participants
- (2) Pre-observation reflection – The person being observed considers what they hope to learn from the process and identifies topics/behaviors on which the observer can focus
- (3) Pre-observation discussion – The person being observed and the observer discuss the goals for the observation and necessary logistics, including preferences for documenting the observation
- (4) Observation – The observer attends an entire class session facilitated by the person being observed
- (5) Post-observation discussion – The person being observed and the observer discuss the class session
- (6) Post-observation reflection – Both participants complete a post-observation reflection
- (7) Process evaluation – Both participants complete a brief process evaluation to provide data for program assessment and signal that the observation is complete

Participants

Approximately one-third of Northwest Missouri State University's faculty will participate in Peer Observation each year. Each participating faculty member will not only be observed, but also serve as an observer for one of his or her colleagues.

Logistics

The faculty member being observed is responsible for completing each step outlined above. Step 1 will be scheduled by the Teaching and Learning Center with all other activities scheduled by participating faculty members at mutually agreeable times.

Documentation

Documentation of the Peer Observation process can be considered from two perspectives: what is helpful for the participants and what is necessary for administrative purposes.

The faculty member being observed and the observer should collaborate to determine what documentation will be helpful for them, including what (if anything) they will include in their respective evaluation documentation or in promotion and tenure portfolios. This may include notes or forms completed during the observation, narratives summarizing observations, and/or personal reflections. Options will be discussed during the orientation session.

The process evaluation form will serve as documentation for administrative purposes. The Teaching and Learning Center staff will provide department chairs with the names of faculty members who complete the observation process, but will not provide additional information about individual observations. Responses on the process evaluation will also be utilized to refine the observation process.



Faculty Peer Observation Guidelines

Pre-observation reflection (person being observed)

The goal of the initial reflection is for the person being observed to identify a focus for the observation so he or she receives feedback that is meaningful and useful. The focus will be communicated to the observer during the pre-observation discussion.

If you are being observed, you might consider the following questions in determining your focus:

- What are your strengths?
- Are there areas you identify as weaknesses?
- What is going well, in general and in individual classes?
- What feels like it could be going better, in general and in individual classes?
- Is this the first time you have taught the course you have selected for observation? If not, are you trying anything new?
- Were you surprised by any of the results from your recent teaching evaluations?

It may also be helpful to consider your thoughts related to the questions suggested below for the pre-observation discussion section.

Pre-observation discussion

The pre-observation discussion provides an orientation for the observer and allows both participants to get to know one another, if applicable. Conversation will center on the focus the person being observed identified in his or her reflection. It might also be helpful to address the following topics:

- What is your goal for the class meeting? What do you hope students will gain from this session? Is this a continuation of a topic and/or will the topic continue during the next class meeting? How will you assess whether you achieved your goal for the class meeting?
- What will be happening during the class session being observed? What teaching techniques will be used? What is the instructor's role? Will this class be generally typical of your teaching? If not, what will be different? What will the students be doing?
- What have students been asked to prepare for this class?
- How would you describe the typical student in the class (motivation, ability, engagement, etc.)?
- How does the session fit in the overall structure of the course? What are the other objectives? What topics have already been addressed and what topics will be addressed later?
- Where does the course fit within the curriculum?

At the end of the discussion the observer should have a clear understanding of the behaviors he or she should focus on during the observation.

Observation

It is tempting for the person being observed to try to “put on a show” when the observer is in the room. That may be counterproductive, though, if it means the session will not be representative of typical behavior. Similarly, the observation should not distract from the objective of the class session or lead to an environment which is not representative of typical classroom dynamics.

- The observer should make an effort to be as unobtrusive as possible by being prompt, sitting in an inconspicuous place, being quiet, and staying for the entire class
- If the observer's presence could be noticeable and distracting to students without an introduction, the observer can be briefly introduced with a quick explanation about why they are there

During the class session the observer should note specific behaviors of the person being observed and the students which relate to the focus of the observation. Those behaviors should be representative of strengths as well as opportunities for development. It may also be helpful to record a general timeline of the session – it may provide a helpful reference point for behaviors that were *not* observed during the class meeting.

In addition to the focus identified by the person being observed, it may be helpful to keep the following questions in mind.

- Did students appear to be prepared and engaged?
- Did students appear confused or angry?
- Did the amount of material covered in the class seem reasonable?
- Did the instructor appear prepared?
- Were the objectives for the class session clear?
- Did the objectives seem appropriate given the level of the course?
- Did the objectives seem appropriate given the time available?
- Were the instructor's explanations and/or instructions clear?
- Did the instructor use engaging and meaningful examples/illustrations?
- Was the overall organization logical?
- Were the teaching methods consistent with the objectives of the class?
- Did the instructor seem interested in the students and their learning?
- Did the instructor seem enthusiastic about the subject matter?

After the session ends, both the person being observed and the observer should consider:

- Areas where the instructor was particularly effective
- The strengths of the session relative to the focus identified by the person being observed
- Opportunities for further enhancing their teaching
- Changes you would suggest given the focus identified by the person being observed

Post-observation discussion

The goal of the post-observation discussion is to provide the person being observed with feedback regarding his or her behavior in the classroom. The face-to-face format is intended to maximize the benefits of the observation process by providing an opportunity for the person being observed to ask questions and engage in brainstorming/problem-solving with the observer. In order to be constructive and productive, the discussion should be:

- Selective, focusing primarily on the focus identified at the beginning of the process
- Behavior based rather than personality focused
- Scheduled as promptly as possible

Post-observation reflection

The post-observation reflection is intended to encourage both the person being observed and the observer to consider how the observation process could influence their behaviors (short-term and long-term).

You might consider the following questions:

- Did anything reinforce or contradict your beliefs about teaching or learning?
- What did you learn about teaching?
- What did you learn about students?
- What do you want to continue doing in your classes?
- What do you want to start doing this term?
- What do you want to start doing in the future?
- What do you want to discontinue immediately?
- What do you want to discontinue in future terms?

Process Evaluation

The purpose of the process evaluation is two-fold. First, it allows the Teaching and Learning Center staff to continuously improve in our efforts to serve faculty. Second, it confirms that you have completed the process.

The evaluation consists of five questions:

1. What was your role in the process? (observer or person being observed)
2. Who was your partner for the process?
3. What class did you observe or have observed?
4. What did you learn from the process?
5. Do you have any suggestions for future participants or for improving the process?

Your responses to the questions above should be submitted via email to haughey@nwmissouri.edu upon completion of the post-observation reflection. Note that you will need to provide two sets of responses – one as an observer and one as the person being observed.