

Guidelines for Faculty Peer Observation of Teaching The University of Texas at San Antonio

The University of Texas at San Antonio 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. An effective tool for faculty development in the area of teaching is provided by the process of peer observation. These guidelines provide recommendations and minimum requirements for the peer observation process to be used by departments in developing their own procedures for peer observation in accordance with the *Handbook of Operating Procedures (HOP)* Chapter 2.20 "Peer Observation of Teaching."

The goal of the peer observation process is to improve teaching methods and student learning and should serve primarily as a tool for mentoring and professional development. The peer observation process should foster a culture of teaching excellence through collegial dialogue. Thus, the outcome of the faculty peer observation process should be a reflective summary describing any steps taken or changes made towards the enhancement of teaching and improvement of student learning.

1. Development of Departmental Guidelines

Departments should develop guidelines outlining the peer observation process. Departmental guidelines are to be developed through consensus of the voting members of the departmental faculty and approved by the Dean. The departmental guidelines should:

- focus on faculty development;
- specify how the peer observation process is to be conducted and should not specify what or how faculty will teach;
- reflect the variety of instructional delivery methods and topics within each department and recognize that no single teaching method or approach is inherently superior to any other; and
- protect against negative effects caused by conflict or disagreements between colleagues.

Department Guidelines should specify:

- that the peer observer's report to the faculty member include suggestions and/or potential resources for improving teaching effectiveness, if applicable;
- whether observation will consist of a single observation or multiple observations by the peer observer(s) to the faculty member's course;
- expectations for any pre- or post-observation meetings between the peer observer(s) and the faculty member;
- course observations will only occur with prior notification and discussion with the faculty member being observed;
- areas of performance to be included in the observation process for different course formats (lecture, lab, online, hybrid); and,
- whether either lecture and lab or both are to be included in the observation for courses in which the faculty member conducts both the lecture and lab sections of the course.

Department guidelines should also make a clear distinction between what is required for the Peer Observer Report and what is required for the Faculty Member's Report. Both of these reports are required to be included in the faculty member's record.

The Department Chair/School Director should ensure that approved Department Guidelines are posted in an online location accessible to all faculty covered by this policy.

2. Who should be observed?

All promotion and tenure review reports sent to the UT System must show evidence of peer observations of teaching, including individuals with administrative appointments of 60% or less. Hence, anyone going up for tenure and/or promotion consideration or undergoing a mandatory Third Year Review MUST have peer observations of their teaching done beforehand. All tenured faculty undergoing a Comprehensive Periodic Evaluation must show evidence of peer observations of teaching, including individuals with administrative appointments of 60% or less. Peer observation for promotion of fixed-term track faculty is also a part of the FTT promotion process.

3. How often should peer observation be conducted?

The following recommendations for the frequency of observation may be modified by departments so long as the requirement of peer observation for mandatory third year reviews, promotion and/or tenure cases, comprehensive periodic evaluations, and FTT promotion is met. Individuals may also request more frequent observation to the extent that this can be accommodated by the department.

Assistant Professors must be reviewed once prior to their third year review and one additional time prior to tenure, unless the faculty member requests additional observations. In addition, Departments are encouraged to engage in yearly course observations for the purpose of mentoring Assistant Professors.

Associate Professors and Full Professors should be reviewed once during each CPE review cycle as defined in HOP 2.22, *Comprehensive Periodic Evaluation of Tenured Faculty*. In addition, Associate Professors should be reviewed once prior to seeking promotion to Full Professor.

Faculty members who are full time and hold the rank of Lecturer, Senior Lecturer shall be reviewed at the discretion of the Department Chair/School Director. However, faculty members at all other ranks and titles shall be reviewed at least every three years.

Any variation from the frequency of observation must be approved by the Dean or other individual designated by the Provost to make such approvals.

4. Who can serve as a peer observer?

Department guidelines should specify who can serve as peer observers. The peer observers can be, but are not required to be, members of the same department or unit as the faculty member. In

addition, the faculty member being observed should have considerable input into who will serve as the peer observer. Finally, observations by non-faculty experts cannot substitute for peer observation.

5. *What training requirements and options are available to the peer observer?*

Department guidelines should specify whether there are requirements for training for peer observation. Guidelines should also direct peer observers to any available options for training, even if not required.

6. *What is to be included in the peer observer's report?*

- A. Name and signature of the Peer Observer
- B. Name of the Faculty Member
- C. Name and course number of observed class(s)
- D. Date of observation(s)
- E. Date of post-observation meeting
- F. The report should reinforce strengths in the faculty member's performance and should provide any recommendation for improvement. This report can be the same report provided to the faculty member if specified by departmental guidelines.
- G. The written report is due to the Department Chair/School Director within one week of the observation or within one week of the final observation, if department guidelines specify that multiple observations should take place. The Department Chair/School Director will file the report with the faculty member's record.

7. *What is to be included in the faculty member's report for inclusion in the faculty member's record?*

- A. Name and signature of Faculty Member
- B. Name of Peer Observer
- C. Name and course number of observed class
- D. Date of pre-observation meeting
- E. Date of observation(s)
- F. Date of post-observation meeting
- G. 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.

The report should be provided to the Department Chair/School Director (or to the dean in the event the faculty member being observed is the Department Chair/School Director) no later than the last day of classes for the semester in which the observation takes place. The Department Chair/School Director or dean will file the report with the faculty member's record.

8. Consideration of peer observation for Promotion and Tenure, Third Year Review, and Comprehensive Periodic Evaluation.

As previously noted, all cases for mandatory third year reviews, promotion and/or tenure, comprehensive periodic evaluations, and FTT promotion must include evidence of peer observation in the form of the report just described.

When the Peer Observer is a member of a FRAC, the Peer Observer may discuss their report with the FRAC as part of the committee's deliberations, just as they might discuss their observations of the faculty member's contribution along other dimensions of teaching, service, and research.

Faculty serving on the DFRAC, CFRAC, and UFRAC should always focus on factual information. Any significant deviations between the Peer Observer's comments to the FRAC and the Peer Observer's and Faculty Member's reports, must be justified and reconciled by the Peer Observer. The FRAC should discount any comments that cannot be reconciled.

Recommended Timeline

<i>Timeline</i>	<i>Action</i>	<i>Responsible Party</i>
At least two weeks prior to first day of class.	Notify faculty member who is to be observed. Provide faculty member with department guidelines. Discuss with faculty member the process of selection of a peer observer(s).	Department Chair/School Director
Prior to the end of second week of the semester	Provide name(s) of possible peer observer(s) to the Department Chair/School Director.	Faculty member
Prior to the end of third week of the semester	Approve or deny possible peer observer(s)	Department Chair/School Director (or Dean when Chair is to be observed)
Prior to the end of fifth week of the semester	Meet to discuss teaching materials and set dates for observation and post-observation meeting(s).	Faculty Member and Peer Observer
Sixth through twelfth week of the semester	Classroom per observation(s)	Peer Observer
Within one week of observation	Post-observation meeting and Peer Observer Report submitted to Department Chair/School Director (or Dean if Chair is being observed).	Faculty Member and Peer Observer

Upon receipt of Peer Observer Report	Files Peer Observer Report in faculty records	Department Chair/School Director (or Dean if Chair is being observed)
No later than last day of the semester	Faculty Member Report provided to Department Chair/School Director (or Dean if Chair is being observed).	Faculty Member
Upon receipt of Faculty Member Report	Files Faculty Member Report in faculty record.	Department Chair/School Director (or Dean if Chair is being observed).