INSTITUTE FOR TEACHING, LEARNING AND ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP
UNIVERSITY AT ALBANY
State University of New York

*A Field Guide to Peer Observation of Teaching**

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The term “peer observation” has taken on a variety of meanings. For the purposes of this document, we will be using this term to refer not only to actual classroom visitation and observation, but also to a broad range of activities related to assessment of teaching. This resource is organized around the following topics.

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I. Prologue: Eight Principles of Effective Teaching

What is good university teaching? There is more agreement on this topic than one might think. The growing body of research continues to point to a set of instructor behaviors and values that are predictive of both how well students learn and student attitudes about learning.

In 1987, Arthur Chickering and Zelda Gamson consolidated the findings of several decades of research on college teaching into a brief manifesto called “Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education.” (*American Association of Higher Education Bulletin* vol.39, no.7, pp.3-7). In 2012, as part of the work of the UAlbany Strategic Plan Implementation, a faculty task force reviewed the published research from the intervening years with an eye toward creating an updated set of principles and standards that could be used to inform the work of contemporary university instructors. The faculty group found that the original “Seven Principles” are still valid and remain the most concise, comprehensive description of effective teaching practices available in the current literature. They serve as a guiding set of ideas that cut across all methods, all disciplines, and all personalities. The faculty task force added one additional principle to bring the original list into alignment with evolving concerns about professional ethics. The resulting product is UAlbany’s “Eight Principles of Effective Teaching,” presented here as a guide to initiatives that aim to enhance UAlbany’s teaching and to ensure the quality of our practices. The Eight Principles can be used not only to guide an individual’s reflection on his/her teaching, but can also serve as a set of criteria to frame effective practices for departments or for the institution as a whole.

1. Good teaching communicates high expectations for students.

2. Good teaching encourages active learning.

3. Good teaching includes clear organization and smart preparation.

4. Good teaching respects diverse talents and ways of learning.

5. Good teaching ensures prompt, frequent, constructive feedback.

6. Good teaching involves productive student-faculty interactions.

7. Good teaching means maintaining respectful, ethical student-faculty interactions.

8. Good teaching invests in continuous improvement.

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II. The Role of Peer Observation in the Assessment and Evaluation of Teaching

Teaching is a multi-dimensional job. Assessing what we do as teachers requires a multi-faceted approach. No single instrument can capture all aspects of any individual style or method of teaching. Student surveys (SIRFs), for instance, can measure whether student perceptions of what we are doing are aligned with what we ourselves think we are doing, but assessing our teaching requires more than student impressions. Peer observation is just one part of a comprehensive, complex process and should be used in conjunction with other means of assessment.

What is a peer?
A peer is a colleague who may or may not be your mentor. While a mentor is usually in a more senior position, colleagues who share the same status can offer each other very useful observations and guidance about teaching. Whom you work with will depend on your political realities and your goals. If you are interested in a content-specific assessment, you will probably want to choose a peer in your department to observe your class; if you would like a more general assessment of broader teaching concerns (e.g., teacher-student rapport, general course design, classroom management, etc.), you might choose to be observed by a peer from another department. In order to get a full and accurate picture of your teaching practice, it is best to be observed by a variety of peers over the course of your career.

What is the difference between formative and summative assessment?
Assessment can have different purposes and take different forms. The distinction between formative and summative is foundational to the approach to peer observation described in this resource. *Formative assessment of teaching* is observation and measurement to inform an individual instructor's teaching practice; formative assessments are conducted for the purpose of growth, improvement, and development. *Summative assessment of teaching* is observation and measurement to inform evaluations based on an established set of criteria; summative assessments are primarily conducted for the purpose of making administrative decisions (like contract renewal, tenure, etc.)

How does peer observation fit into a formative and summative assessment plan?
Ideally, a fair and comprehensive plan to evaluate teaching would incorporate many data points drawn from multiple teaching dimensions. Such a plan would include not only student surveys, but also self-assessments, documentation of instructional planning and design, evidence of activity to improve teaching, and most importantly, concrete evidence of student learning.

But that is not all. A comprehensive assessment or evaluation of teaching would necessarily include evidence of sound teaching practices and behaviors. For the collection of this evidence we need for someone (or even multiple people) to watch what we do and observe how students react. This is the purpose of peer assessment, more commonly referred to as peer observation.

What is the scope of peer observation?
While we often use the term "observation" to refer only to classroom visits, peer observation is also a broader process by which university instructors collect data to provide feedback to colleagues on their teaching efforts and practices. The process might include, but is not limited to—

- review of course planning and design (syllabus, lesson plans, web presence)
- review of instructional materials (handouts, exercises, readings, lectures, activities)
- review of learning assessments (tests, graded assignments)
- review of teaching strategies, techniques and behaviors
- review of in-class interaction with students

Why peer observation?
There are clear benefits to using peer observation.

1. *Our faculty peers are usually aware of the departmental teaching mission and the intended learning outcomes of our programs.* They teach the same students and face the same challenges that we do. Many are, themselves, experienced, effective teachers. Therefore, they are likely to be competent observers of various aspects of our teaching.
2. *Peer observation offers much-needed flexibility in the assessment of teaching effectiveness.* Depending on what an instructor wants to learn about his/her teaching, a peer can be identified in the instructor's home department in the same content area, so that the observation can be related specifically to an instructor's handling of a given content or to students' progress toward a given learning outcome. In other circumstances, it might be desirable to find a peer observer outside the instructor's department, in order to focus on non-content concerns, such as the flavor and tone of student-faculty interaction, or the design of a particular activity. In some cases, an instructor might invite a faculty member with expertise in a particular method, in order to provide an expert's perspective. How the peer observer is chosen will be determined by the purpose of the observation, the political realities of the department, and how the collected data will be used. More on these aspects of peer observation will be provided in later chapters.
3. *Some dimensions of teaching effectiveness are most appropriately assessed by peers.* While students are well-equipped to assess their own experience in a course, faculty peers are better suited for assessing the work of other faculty members in certain matters of content, course design, and professionalism. Some key areas in which faculty are considered to be expert reviewers include but are not limited to
    - Adequacy of course rigor and challenge
    - Course organization
    - Clarity and appropriateness of course objectives
    - Classroom management and engagement of students
    - Selection of course content
    - Effectiveness of instructional materials (e.g., readings, media)
    - Appropriateness of evaluation of learning (e.g., exams, assignments)
    - Appropriateness of methods used to teach specific types of content
    - Commitment to teaching and concern for student learning
    - Support of departmental instructional culture

What are the risks of using peer observation in the evaluation of teaching?
One downside of peer observation is that it may be difficult for even a well-intentioned observer to filter out his/her own bias against a given teaching method or personality while conducting an observation. For example, someone who values strict classroom control and considers the instructor's presentation to be the key learning object of the classroom may miss pertinent evidence when observing moments of seeming chaos in a collaborative learning classroom, and vice versa. For this reason, instructors who use peer observation will need to consider the observer's assumptions about teaching and possibly plan for visits by multiple peers.

Another risk is that if colleagues within the same department observe one another and the process is not well-managed, relationships may suffer. Rightly or wrongly, many faculty members consider their teaching to be a highly private concern. And because a peer observation can make teaching a little more public, the process requires discretion and a careful touch.

Being well informed about best practices for peer observation is one way to reduce the risk of potential damage. Subsequent sections of this book will attempt to supply a few ideas related to such concerns.

What are the costs of developing a peer observation process?

These vary depending on the size of the department. Faculty time and some administrative services will be required, no matter what the plan. For large departments these will be collectively significant, since it may be necessary to form a committee or a task force, and it would be wise to ask the faculty to engage in some training and norming. It will also be important to support the additional paperwork that will accompany greater attention to assessment.

For these and other reasons, developing a peer observation program will need planning and broad support of the departmental faculty.

What is the purpose of this document?

The Institute for Teaching, Learning and Academic Leadership offers this resource on peer observation in support of the University at Albany's teaching mission as part of an effort to develop a fair, comprehensive, effective and civil plan for assessing and improving teaching and learning. While peer observation is only one of many ways to provide feedback to faculty on their teaching, it is a highly useful one, and it readily complements the practice of teaching assessment and evaluation that relies heavily—and unfortunately, sometimes exclusively—on feedback from students.

We do not offer this resource to promote the substitution of one type of teaching assessment for another. The assessment of teaching—whatever the purpose—needs to be multidimensional and customized from program to program and instructor to instructor in order to capture those elements most relevant to departmental mission and to the faculty's most valued teaching objectives. We offer this resource in the spirit of facilitating faculty efforts to measure those dimensions of teaching effectiveness that current evaluation practices, such as student surveys alone, might ignore.

III. Peer Observation for both Formative and Summative Assessment

Not all types of assessment serve the same purpose. In some cases, an instructor wants to receive personalized feedback on how a course is going, how students are responding to an activity, or simply whether or not students seem to be learning. The purpose of this kind of ongoing, continuous assessment is to help the instructor make adjustments that will improve the quality of the course over the long term. This kind of feedback is called *formative assessment* because it is ongoing and its purpose is developmental. It asks, What is going well that I can build on? What can I do better?

How is *summative* assessment different from *formative* assessment?
Summative assessment is the review of evidence in order to make a judgment. If formative assessment is a continuous process aimed at instructional improvement over time, summative assessment is the opposite: it is a snapshot, an evaluation intended to indicate a level of competence at a moment in time, measured against a standard or against a field. Summative assessments of teaching and research allow administrators to make decisions on such things as promotion, tenure, raises, awards, etc.

Why is this distinction so important?
Here is an example of the problem. If you truly want to improve a course you are teaching and you solicit input from a colleague, you are likely to accept his/her honest feedback—however negative it may be—as potentially painful but necessary, and useful rather than threatening. You might even go so far as to *invite* negative criticism by explaining to a peer observer, "I'm having a problem in class with the way this activity is working. Could you please come to my class, take a look at it and tell me what I might do differently?" If the negative feedback you get from the observation is accurate, it has the positive benefit of showing you how to be more effective. That's the purpose of formative assessment. It has to be confidential so that it can be candid. It is for you and nobody else to process and act upon, if you choose to do so.

Now picture the situation where the same peer observer who visited your class is asked to evaluate your teaching (summatively) *for your permanent file*, based on the same report he/she created for you, personally, candidly and confidentially. The same criticism that you invited from him/her in the first place can suddenly, if handled carelessly or unscrupulously, become evidence that unfairly and inaccurately paints your entire professional practice in a negative light. Your teaching might, in fact, be highly effective overall (*and you even cared enough to solicit feedback in the first place*!), but the recorded evidence now invites a potentially biased or ill-informed reviewer to focus on negative dimensions of your teaching, and these might not even be central to your achievements and competence as a teacher.

In order to avoid situations like these, it is important that the formative assessment you solicit for improvement be explicitly differentiated from the summative assessment or evaluation since the purposes that drive the two processes are very different. *If we want to motivate instructors to seek candid feedback and reflect on their teaching, we have to create a process in which they are not penalized for doing so.* For this reason, it is in the best interest of departments to create and a peer observation process that encourages both formative and summative assessments. (This process is discussed at length in Part V of this document.) When designing assessment practices for yourself and for your own department, peer observers should carefully distinguish between the procedures and comments intended to improve teaching and the procedures and comments intended for administrative records.

How effective is peer observation for formative assessment?
The first-hand witnessing by a colleague of what is happening in the classroom can uncover circumstances that otherwise might remain hidden from the instructor. A peer observer can see how students in the back of the classroom react to something the instructor is doing in the front. This person can share the perspective of the students and report back to the instructor what that view looks like. In this formative process the observer can also offer feedback on the design of the course, the validity of a test, or the content of a syllabus, to cite a few examples.

Key Principle: In order for formative peer observation to be effective, it must respond to the concerns and self-perceived needs of the instructor who requests it. It must also be carried out by someone who is trusted and holds the respect of the observee.

How can a chair, dean or other administrator foster an environment in which instructors are encouraged to seek improvements in their teaching?
It's not easy. Attention to teaching has usually occurred in the context of evaluation rather than improvement. Encouragement, facilitation (e.g., creating low-stakes opportunities), and subtle pressure are most effective. Ultimately the decision to participate in a formative assessment process should lie with the instructor her/himself. When an administrator demands an assessment, it can quickly cross the line into summative assessment.

Administrators can help the process by creating the conditions for effective formative assessment through their leadership in various ways:

- by developing clear, well-articulated expectations for teaching effectiveness, so that an instructor has reason to reflect on his/her own progress and skill level;
- by sponsoring a process for the whole department to support teaching skill development;
- by conspicuously participating—as an observee—in peer observation, him/herself, to set an example;
- by structuring opportunities for confidential peer feedback, such as through mentoring programs or "buddy" systems; and
- by designing collaboratively with faculty a teaching assessment plan, to allow faculty members to agree on the "targets" and criteria by which their teaching will be evaluated.

Outside entities, such as ITLAL, a faculty member from another department, or a consultant from elsewhere are potential resources that administrators can use in developing this kind of framework and in providing a wide variety of tools for formative assessment. An outside organization can also help a department develop a new standard for instructional assessment without the politically perilous act of imposing one from the top.

Is peer observation potentially too political to be used for summative assessment?
If poorly planned and managed, it most certainly can be destructive. If there are no clear criteria or clearly delineated, documented procedures, for example, peer observation can be disastrous. A single unannounced visit to the classroom of a candidate for tenure, for the purpose of making a judgment about his/her teaching, is not just misguided—it is a serious lapse in professional judgment on the part of those involved.

Furthermore, if drop-in summative peer observations are conducted in the absence of a process for formative assessment, then they can be seen—and rightly so—as punitive. Consider as an analogy a biology course in which students have no access to formative feedback on their learning throughout the semester, no chance to measure their learning against the hidden criteria, but then are given a final exam that will determine—once and for all— their acceptance into medical school. The summative peer observation has to be implemented within a process that communicates expectations and provides feedback before making a definitive judgment that can affect a person's professional status.

This is particularly crucial in the case of less experienced instructors. If a department has no process or procedure in place to help new instructors develop and refine their practices, a summative assessment is highly suspect. It builds into the assessment process the flawed assumption that teaching is a *static* process. Furthermore, a summative assessment without its formative complement easily becomes a political tool that can be manipulated and abused to serve individual interests.

The good news is that summative peer observations can capture dimensions of teaching—such as rapport with students, mood of the classroom, student excitement, creative use of visual support, and creativity of teaching materials—that do not typically register through other evaluation processes. For an instructor who has had opportunities for feedback by his peers in a supportive environment, a series of classroom observations for tenure review purposes can be a critical, positive part of a comprehensive, multi-faceted summative assessment of teaching.

Negative attitudes about summative assessment more often than not have to do with lack of a comprehensive process and with how it is handled by a given administrator. This latter topic will be treated in greater detail in Part V.

How can formative and summative assessments of teaching be coordinated?
The faculty members of a department or program should start by identifying the goals of learning and the dimensions of teaching that it values most. This is not to suggest that all teaching should be the same. However, the faculty in a given department should all agree on a set of outcomes that they seek for their students, and consider the kinds of teaching practices that will support them. This discussion could focus on the following three questions:

1. How should our students be changed *as a result of* our program?
2. What kinds of things should we do ourselves and encourage in each other to ensure that students change in the way we intended?
3. What evidence will tell us if we have been effective in helping students change?

Formative assessment is part of a department's continuing consideration of its teaching mission and values. With the answers to these questions made explicit by the department, the faculty now has general agreement on the types of teaching strategies and practices that will be valued and encouraged. Resources and faculty development efforts can be directly tied to these expectations, and veteran faculty members can serve as mentors to new faculty members to provide personalized, confidential feedback on teaching. Mentors can consult with the new faculty on their course design and visit their classrooms regularly to provide feedback. This "formative" process should be informal, supportive, sympathetic and friendly, with frequent contact between the parties involved.

The summative assessment process is built on top of the formative process. The summative assessment is not ongoing but occurs periodically in predetermined windows within a faculty member's pre-tenure probation and subsequent career. Biannually, for example, the department can collect data from several key places to determine how the faculty member is developing as a teacher. The assessment questions in this case would be the following:

1. Is the faculty member teaching in ways (using strategies and methods) that are consistent with the stated goals of the department?
2. Are the instructor's students changing/developing in an acceptable way, at an acceptable rate? (How are the students doing in subsequent courses?)

The first question could be answered by peer reviews of materials and classroom observations, using instruments designed to reflect the department's teaching mission. The second question could be answered by tracking student performance and progress through the program, looking at student writing samples or other products, as well as by looking at student survey data.

IV. Formative Assessment of Teaching using Peer Observation

Formative assessment of teaching adheres to a few key principles:

1. *It is frequent.* The goal is to encourage development and track it over time.
2. *It is confidential.* The observee needs to feel free to invite candid, including negative, feedback.
3. *It is analytical without being judgmental.* The observee needs accurate, supportive input from colleagues, not accusations about his/her professional practice.
4. *It is non-threatening.* The assessment should be invited by the observee and must carry no negative consequences.
5. *It is collaborative.* The observee should be a partner in deciding which aspects of teaching will be assessed, and who will do it.

Whether you develop a plan for yourself or it is sponsored by your department, there are several questions that you will need to address before using peer observation for the formative assessment of your own teaching.

What is your position/status in your department or program?
Your answer to this question will suggest the strategy you might pursue in developing a peer observation plan. If you are a tenured faculty member you will probably be less constrained than if you are new and untenured. Established, tenured faculty may be in a position that allows you to model best practices of peer observation. You can become a leader by initiating formative peer observations for yourself and any willing colleagues who will join you. Over time, you can then report to your colleagues the benefits of peer observation, and even begin to suggest ways to establish a system that will help newer faculty receive the feedback they need in a non-punitive, positive, supportive process.

If you are untenured and there is a clear process in place, such as a mentoring or buddy program, you are very fortunate. However, you may want to examine the process and ask questions to make sure that the distinctions between formative and summative assessment are clearly respected. Not all of your colleagues will be equally sensitive to the need for confidentiality, so you will want to be sure of the expectations of the person(s) assigned to you. You do not want to get caught in a situation where you invite feedback, only to find that your colleague has discussed his/her observation of your teaching with other members of the department, without your approval, or worse, put a letter in your file.

If you are untenured and in a department that has no process is in place to guide your formative assessment, you will need to proceed carefully. Talk with your colleagues to learn the history and where the political fault lines lie. Your goal is to build a network of people in your department who share the value of informal feedback on teaching and who can be trusted to participate in an exchange of services, completely separate from departmental evaluations. If you suspect that this conversation will be controversial, a safer approach in these circumstances is to work with peers elsewhere in the university. Check with ITLAL, which can help you find colleagues to work with.

Regardless of your position, here is one great concern to keep in mind: if effective teaching and the evaluation of teaching have not traditionally been an explicit priority of the department, it is quite possible that the formative/summative distinction will not be fully appreciated. In this case, when you ask your chair or other colleagues for help in assessing your teaching for formative purposes, you might end up in a de facto summative assessment.

What type of teaching do you do?
Before beginning the peer observation process, it is important for instructors to spend some time reflecting on their teaching values and practices. A first step is to clarify your answers to some fundamental questions:

- How do you want your students to change as a result of your teaching?
- What teaching role(s) you have adopted in order to facilitate these changes in your students?
- Which teaching tools (methods, techniques, technologies) have you chosen to support that role?

As a starting point for this reflection, consider this partial list of what university teachers do:

- Maintenance and furtherance of disciplinary knowledge (via reading, research and publication)
- Curriculum design
- Course and syllabus design
- Assignment design
- Engagement/interaction with students
- Presentation of material (lectures, for example)
- Integration of technology (from low-tech blackboards and chalk to high-tech teaching on-line)
- Assessment of student learning (testing, grading, tracking)
- Direction of student independent study and research
- Advising and mentoring of students
- Scholarship of teaching (reading, presenting, writing about teaching in the discipline)
- Supervision of graduate and undergraduate TA's and RA's

In any given teaching situation you will be involved in some combination of these activities, and your emphasis will vary from course to course, year to year. Taking stock of what your dominant functions are in any course is key to preparing for peer observation. In order to design a formative peer assessment so it can be effective, develop a clear picture of who you are as a teacher, what your chosen practices are, and why.

How do you define your role as a teacher?
For some instructors it helps to approach the question above from the point of view of the role you play with/for your students. Which of the following concepts best captures the essence of what you do as a teacher?

- Coach
- Director/Manager/Organizer
- Activity or Event Designer
- Case creator
- Consultant
- Content expert
- Coordinator of activities
- Discussion facilitator
- Assessor/Evaluator of learning
- Skeptical Questioner
- Theatrical Performer
- Role model
- Negotiator
- Advisor
- Listener
- Circus ring leader
- Parent
- Colleague or Peer

Why do you teach the way you teach?
Once you have articulated *who* you are as a teacher, it is equally important to connect your role to the strategies and techniques you have chosen. When communicated to your observer, this connection creates the context for understanding your choices as a teacher, which is necessary if the feedback you

receive is to be relevant. If, for example, you intend for a class meeting to encourage lateral thinking by students, the observation by a peer that you did not adequately control the focus of the class or present enough information may not help you become more effective. What you need is for the observer to recommend to you ways to provoke or encourage the lateral thinking you wanted to happen.

The following chart is a resource to help connect the goals and methods of your teaching to categories of observable activities that might be identified for your peers in advance of an observation.

Matching Teaching Method with Observable Teaching Behavior

Teaching Method Used	**Instructor's activity to be observed**
Problem-solving; Problem-Based Learning	Design of Problem Organization of materials Structure of the learning activity Management of classroom process
Information Transfer (Lectures)	Selection of material Organization of material Clarity of presentation Enthusiasm, encouragement of student interest Translation from abstract to concrete Engagement with audience Use of different media for support
Discussion	Facilitation of directed conversation Setting of mood and tone Questioning strategies Questioning sequence Discussion initiation strategies Engagement of all students Anchoring, assessing, and clarifying student learning gains
One-on-One	Mentoring Guiding without dictating Personal Communication behavior Questioning strategies Affective considerations
Teaching Online	Design of assignments and activities for accessibility, usability of online materials Conceptualization of learning environment Constructive online communications Management of online discussion

This list is only partial. An excellent resource to guide a self-analysis of your teaching is Anthony Grasha's *Teaching with Style* (Pittsburgh, PA: Alliance, 1996), a handbook for university teachers that shows the connection between teaching beliefs, teaching philosophy, methods, and practices. A copy can be found in ITLAL's library.

How do you prepare yourself—and your colleagues—for a peer observation of your teaching for formative purposes?
After you have spent some time considering the questions above, you are ready to begin the peer observation process. An effective process of peer observation includes the following components.

1. *Sharing of relevant course materials* with the observer, at least 2-3 days before the observation: syllabus; lesson plan; planned future quiz or exam on relevant material, handouts, slides, etc.
2. *Face-to-face pre-observation meeting* at least one day before the observation, between observer and observee. A meeting just before the class is less effective than an advance meeting.
3. *The observation,* with note-taking by observer. These "field notes" should loosely resemble those of an ethnographer observing a distinct culture. The purpose of the notes is not to simply identify problems but to record accurately what happens in class, whether positive or negative. The observer should also write down analytical questions ("Why did you do that?" for example) that occur to him/her at particular moments in class, for discussion with the instructor afterward.
4. *Reflection by both parties*. Both observer and observee need to schedule time to reflect—separately—after the observation. The observer needs to analyze his/her notes and identify the primary themes for discussion. The observee needs to self-assess and plan questions for the observer that could be used to help analyze the experience.
5. *A face-to-face post-observation meeting* a day or two after the class observation. The point of this meeting is to share perspectives and to reach greater insight as to why things occurred the way they did. The observee should state what he/she experienced in the classroom from the instructor's perspective; the observer should offer corroborations where appropriate or additional observations and analysis that help the observee more assess the experience from a different perspective.
6. *Written summary* (optional). Depending on how the observee wishes to use the assessment, a write-up is a possible final step in the process. An instructor *might* want to document a peer observation as part of a teaching portfolio. However, whether or not to use a formative peer observation in a summative assessment has to be the free decision of the observee.

How should a pre-observation meeting be structured?
In the pre-observation meeting the instructor needs to be able to explain the purpose of the class, what will be happening, and why. The observer needs to understand the instructor's expectations for what will happen in class. The instructor also needs to tell the observer the kinds of things to focus on: classroom management, discussion prompts, student response, etc.

To ensure useful observations by a peer, you will need to be able to communicate to your observer the answers to the following questions, so your peer's observations will be relevant to the context of your own (and not his/her) teaching.

1. What are your objectives for the students in the class being observed? (What changes do you want students to undergo? What skills, knowledge, and perspectives will they be developing?)
2. What will be your role (your own function) in the process?
3. What have you chosen to do (and how does this choice connect to your objective and role)?
4. What are your expectations for what students will actually do, and for what will actually happen in the classroom?
5. How will you know if you have been successful?

How should a post-observation meeting be structured?
In the post-observation meeting the observer needs to give the observee the opportunity to explain what he/she believes was happening in the class and make an assessment of where there was evidence of success or struggle. Then the observer should report back to the instructor what he/she saw happening in the class, focusing specifically (though not necessarily exclusively) on the areas that he/she agreed to focus on. Some questions that might be used to drive this conversation include the following:

1. Was this a typical class? Did the class go as you had expected?
2. Were there any surprises?
3. What did you think went particularly well?
4. What didn't go the way you had hoped?

What should you do if you are invited to observe a colleague's teaching for formative purposes?
Before you conduct an observation of a colleague's teaching, it is important for you to spend some time reflecting on your own teaching beliefs and practices. It is important, for example, to consider where your own thinking about teaching might color what you see or interfere with your ability to observe a classroom with total objectivity.

The pre-observation meeting is intended in part to gain clarity on the differences in how observer and observee conceptualize teaching. There are several steps to the observation process, and the more thorough you are in your preparation, the more likely you are to provide your colleague with meaningful feedback. Here are some important strategies to ensure a productive observation.

- Well in advance of the observation, request relevant course materials from the observee. Review them before the pre-observation meeting. These materials are most likely to be the course syllabus, a lesson plan for the targeted class meeting, copies of exercises and assignments to be used in this particular class meeting, possibly some sample quiz or exam questions that will be used to test students on this part of the course.
- Insist on meeting face-to-face with the colleague before the event to be observed. (A phone call or e-mail exchange are better than nothing, but not ideal.) This meeting may focus on the following:
    - Discuss and make sure you understand your colleague's values and self-image as a teacher.
    - Ask for an explanation of what your colleague will be doing, and why.
    - Ask your colleague to predict what should happen in class.
    - Ask your colleague to explain what his/her measurement of success will be for what happens in the observed class meeting. (How will you both know if he/she has been successful?)
    - Ask your colleague to indicate special issues or concerns that he/she wants you to pay attention to during the observation.
- Insist on meeting with the observee after the visit.

How effective is video recording a class meeting for formative evaluation purposes?
The advantage of video recording is that an instructor can view the class as many times as desired before showing it to a colleague. This allows for greater safety and comfort, if these are needed. It also has the

advantage of greatly objectifying what happens in the classroom. Viewing the recording shows not only what the instructor does, but, depending on how well it is recorded, also how students are responding. It is difficult to overlook what is going on in the classroom when it is playing in color before you.

Another advantage is that the video recording can be discussed with several different colleagues to elicit differing perspectives on the same class meeting.

Finally, a video recording is an excellent record of certain teaching techniques that are difficult to capture on paper. For some teachers, a video clip can be an effective component of a teaching portfolio, so it will have a purpose in summative as well as formative assessment.

What are some of the practical issues of video recording?
The faculty member and the video camera operator will need to meet in advance of the session to be recorded in order to reach an understanding of what will happen. Will the operator remain in the room during the shooting? Will the camera be stationary or will it move to follow movements in the classroom? Will the operator focus only on the instructor, or will he/she be asked to track individual students or groups as well? How will sound be captured, and will sound need to be captured from anyone other than the instructor?

What are the downsides of video recording?
The problem with a video recording is its potential to needlessly diminish an instructor’s confidence by hyper-objectifying (and seemingly exaggerating) small flaws in a teaching performance, which, while often insignificant in terms of student learning, can be deflating to a new instructor watching him/herself for the first time. We recommend working with a member of the ITLAL staff to review the recording in a productive way.

V. Developing a Departmental Plan for Formative Use of Peer Observation

Depending on the current politics of your department, you will have to choose between a comprehensive plan and an *ad hoc* approach. If your department's leadership has the trust and respect of most of its faculty, and if the normal fault lines in any academic unit have not evolved into major schisms, you have the luxury of working with your chair and other opinion leaders in your department to develop a systematic approach right from the start.

Here is a word of caution: Setting up a department-wide formative process for peer observation, where none has existed in the past, will require a broad, structured conversation with most department members. You may want to invite a facilitator from outside the department to lead the discussion. Without this conversation, it will be difficult to account for and address the incredible range of issues—many of them emotionally charged—that will be on the minds of your colleagues. Historically, university teaching assessment practices nationwide have been deplorable, and nearly everyone will be able to recall a personal experience that illustrates the potential risk and pain of trusting colleagues to participate in the assessment of teaching, even for well-meaning development purposes.

For some of your colleagues, the notion of *formative* assessment as distinct from *summative* assessment will not be seen as essential. This can be a stumbling block. The broad conversation among faculty will therefore need to reach clarity on these two concepts, and ensure that they inform whatever system the department decides to use. In addition, the following principles of formative assessment, iterated in the previous chapter, are useful to keep in mind.

1. *It is frequent.* The goal is to encourage development and track it over time.
2. *It is confidential.* The observee needs to feel free to invite candid, including negative, feedback.
3. *It is analytical without being judgmental.* The observee needs honest, supportive, accurate input from colleagues, not accusations about his/her professional practice.
4. *It is non-threatening.* The assessment should be invited by the observee, and must carry no negative consequences.
5. *It is collaborative.* The observee should be a partner in deciding which aspects of teaching will be assessed, and who will do it.

What are some workable, time-tested models for department-sponsored formative assessment of teaching?

We recommend any of these three. The one your department uses will depend on several factors, which are addressed below.

A. The Buddy System
B. The Team System
C. The Mentor System

A. The buddy system

What is the buddy system?

The assumption behind the buddy system is that the most reliable, most trustworthy observer of your teaching is someone whose professional trajectory, professional status, and teaching interests are most like yours. This is in contrast to the mentor system (described below), in which you work with an observer who has more experience, seniority, and expertise than you do.

What are the advantages of the buddy system?
The buddy system emphasizes the friendly, non-threatening aspects of peer observation. For a new pre-tenure faculty member or a lecturer, for example, a peer with the same professional status has no authority with regard to your employment. Free of the hierarchy, you are more likely to have candid communications with this person and share certain perspectives and attitudes. Add to this the probability that you will be closer to this person on the learning curve as a teacher and will therefore be dealing with many of the same issues. If you are sympathetic to each other's concerns, you will be more likely to find in this person a colleague with whom to collaborate and share openly and unselfconsciously all ideas related to teaching.

What are the potential pitfalls of the buddy system?
Not all buddies are equal, and therefore you risk getting poor advice if you have not chosen your buddy wisely. Beware of the "I'll stroke your ego if you'll stroke mine" trap. Also, if you have only one buddy, you risk getting feedback that might not provide a complete picture. *Particularly important is not to align yourself with someone who has not adapted well to the department.* Rather, seek a buddy who seems well-adjusted and is respected by colleagues.

A complete newbie may also have limited experience with—and thus a limited perspective on—teaching. It is important to make sure that your buddies and you are both fully informed about the expectations for teaching in your department. You will need to have conversations about teaching with other departmental colleagues to get a feel for the mission, if it is not already explicit.

Another risk of the buddy system relates to the size of your department. In small departments where the hiring of new faculty occurs only occasionally, it may be impossible for newer faculty members to find buddies in the same or related discipline. If the buddy system is what the department decides to promote, it may be necessary to seek buddy candidates in another department or even in another college.

A final difficulty is that the buddy system may not work if imposed artificially from above. It works best when two colleagues discover common interests and pursue them together. Engineering such a discovery is a tough act, even for the best administrators.

What do buddies do to help each other?
In the buddy system, two colleagues exchange services. These can include but are not restricted to the following:

- Reviewing, critiquing syllabus and course design
- Brainstorming lesson plans, assignments and classroom activities
- Reviewing, critiquing tests and quizzes
- Exchanging classroom visits several times per semester
- Sharing materials, if you are teaching similar courses
- Sharing teaching techniques that have been successful
- Watching a video recording of a class with you
- Working together to interpret the results of student surveys

How does a department set up a buddy system?
If the department wants to use this system it will have to make explicit the expectation that incoming faculty members seek out colleagues on their own, either inside or outside the department, and are held responsible for a minimum number of classroom visits. For those faculty members who have been at the university for a while, it should be relatively easy for them to find a trusted colleague with whom to

work. For newer faculty, it will be necessary to make a conscious, concerted effort to socialize with other newer faculty from across the university. Check with ITLAL, which is one of the places on campus where cross-disciplinary socialization is likely to occur. This office will also have an active accounting of which departments have new faculty, and which new faculty members are likely to be looking for buddies.

What about accountability? If faculty members choose not to do it, how will the system work?
If the department truly wants to be systematic about adopting this strategy, it will need to institute some means of assessing whether faculty are actually doing it. This can be done through each faculty member's documentation of his/her collaboration as a part of an annual teaching self-evaluation or as part of a teaching portfolio. The documentation would *not* include the content (such as results or peer reports) of the peer observations, but just a record that the collaboration occurred, and perhaps an indication of any new instructional ideas that grew from that collaboration.

B. The Team System

What is the team system?
The assumption behind the team system is that there is safety in numbers. This is the faculty equivalent of a support group.

The team system is similar in many ways to the buddy system in the sense that it is an *exchange of services* (see that list, above), but it has more flexibility in terms of who can comprise a team. Some of the same values prevail, but here there is less emphasis on homogeneity and more room for diversity. Also, there is less concern about power relations and more concern for multiplicity of perspectives. While the Buddy System is designed to work around departmental power alignments by avoiding them altogether, the Team System offsets issues of power, authority and hierarchy through multiple participants and multiple perspectives.

What are the challenges of using the team system?
These are the same as they would be for the buddy system. It is hard to assign a team that works. Accountability is not easy.

What are the advantages of the team system?
The great advantage is multiple perspectives on your teaching. You will be amazed at how two or three of your peers can reach very different conclusions about your teaching, based on their own assumptions. Another advantage is convenience. With more peers available to you, you are more likely to find someone who is free to visit your classroom. You do not need to exchange visits one-on-one. If you observe colleague A, he/she can observe colleague B, who might observe you.

C. The Mentor System

How does the mentor system compare to the buddy and team systems?
The mentor system is the easiest of the systems for departments to implement formally because the model works within the power-and-influence relations that are common between veteran and new faculty members. The assumptions are that someone who has "been there and done that" will be an effective guide to a newbie (an apprentice), and that a newbie, out of respect will work with whoever is assigned to him/her. Given this traditional format, a department chair or a dean can reasonably assign a mentor to a new faculty member and expect the new faculty member to feel committed to work with the mentor. The challenge for the administrator is to choose carefully an appropriate mentor for new faculty member. This decision will be based on a range of criteria, including personality, ambition, interests,

level of confidence, expertise; administrators might also include considerations such as gender, ethnicity, and nationality.

Do the mentor and mentee exchange services, just like in the buddy and team system?
Yes, that's the point. One good way to mentor someone is to ask them to do for you what you hope they will ask you to do for them. Establishing an exchange of services reduces the potential for friction implied in the power relation. In some mentoring systems, unfortunately, the mentor carries out the feedback services for the mentee, as on a one-way street. Or worse, the mentor invites the mentee to visit a class in order to "show them how it's done." Therein lies one of the problems of this system; it can reinforce systemically the lower status of the mentee.

What are the potential pitfalls of the mentor system?
Mentor systems go wrong when the assumptions of hierarchy upon which they are based are not true for all of those who participate, whether mentor or mentee. While many new faculty may appreciate the attention of a dedicated mentor, others perceive the relationship as an unwanted intrusion and even a threat. These situations can present a real barrier to a successful formative assessment process, as mentees may fear that *any* observation is by nature summative and necessarily will be part of a tenure decision. In some cases there are simply clashes of personality, especially since the mentor is typically imposed, not chosen. In other cases, poorly handled power relations can complicate other embedded issues, such as those of gender and ethnicity.

Mentor systems have a higher rate of success when they are managed outside of the departmental power structure, and when the mentor comes from a different department or college. This removes the mentee's potential fear of being observed by the same person who might be in a position of judgment at a later date.

A handbook with best practices for mentoring is available at the Provost's Office website: https://www.albany.edu/academics/mentoring.best.practices.toc.shtml.

Given the potential problems, why should departments consider developing a peer observation system for formative assessment?
The goal is to get the faculty to take ownership of a department's overall teaching quality, so it's worth the risk to put into place the means to share the responsibility. Even with the potential pitfalls, departments that talk about teaching tend to do a better job of it.

Which formative peer observation system is right for your department?
Since each department has its own strengths and issues, there are no rules. If your department is small and has a history of congeniality and talking openly about teaching, an informal mentoring system can be effective, in that it might function much like a buddy or team system. On the other hand, the mentoring system is more likely to work well in a large department, where it is possible to assign to a new faculty member someone who can keep some distance from the candidate's tenure judgment.

Departments with severe political divisions or problems of incivility should avoid the department-based mentoring system and look for mentoring opportunities led by external organizations such as ITLAL. Another option in such cases is to encourage new faculty to find buddies or work with teams in other departments, and provide documentation in their teaching portfolios.

VI. Developing a Departmental Plan for Summative Use of Peer Observation

Summative assessment of teaching effectiveness requires a more methodical and procedural approach than does a system for formative assessment. The two should be developed together and should be coordinated, but a summative assessment needs to be formalized and procedurally strict so as not to compromise its integrity at any point during the process. Keep in mind, too, that careers are at stake, so the system must be designed to accomplish its goals fairly and steadily even in the face of controversy.

How can you avoid some key problems in using peer observations for summative purposes?
A careful administrator can minimize the problems inherent in evaluation of teaching by creating the conditions for effective summative assessment through his/her leadership. Some key best practices for ensuring these conditions include the following:

- making the departmental learning outcomes and teaching mission public,
- publicly participating in and offering to model being evaluated,
- making the teaching mission and evaluation forms available prior to classroom visits,
- arranging meetings with faculty prior to and after an evaluation,
- clearly articulating accepted standards for performance, tied to the values and mission,
- achieving departmental consensus on the objectives of classes that will be evaluated, and
- meeting with faculty after an assessment to answer questions.

How can a fair system be developed?
The single most important factor is the careful preparation (via orientation and training) of the faculty evaluators. This may seem counter-intuitive, since the faculty can cite their great amounts of teaching experience as sufficient training, but it is difficult to over-estimate the risk of launching a program without making sure everyone practices certain procedures and understands why they are essential. Assessment specialists can be invited into the department to do group sessions for the entire faculty, or those who will conduct peer observations can be asked to attend workshops addressing this set of skills. Practice evaluations, role plays, and norming sessions through case studies are particularly useful in preparing faculty to observe their colleagues in the classroom.

There are several other important steps in developing a plan for summative assessment of teaching.

- *Consider your department's mission and teaching values*. If you are going to build a sound teaching evaluation plan, the values that guide the system should be explicit and directly connected to things that are most important to your faculty. Otherwise, the criteria for evaluation will constantly shift depending on pet concerns and different personalities, thus invalidating the process and creating political problems.

- *If you have not already done so, you will need to identify specific learning outcomes for your graduating students*. This means that you will need to record clearly, through faculty consensus, what you want students to become during their time under the influence of your academic program. Your outcomes will indicate what you value most as teachers, and therefore which approaches to teaching are most likely to generate the results you target in your students.

- *Consider the political climate of your department and college*. The personalities of the key administrators as well as the unofficial opinion leaders will surely have an effect on both the function of the process as well as the perceived validity of the results. Depending on the make-up of your department, it may not be enough to simply start with the enthusiasts and hope to pull along the rest. Even the most recalcitrant should be invited into the discussion at some point early in the process. It is often a good idea to invite in a facilitator from outside the department to structure a discussion on the process of developing a summative evaluation plan.

- *Consider how the evaluation process will be administered*. Will there be a committee that takes responsibility for the process? Or will the whole department share in that responsibility? Even if you go with a committee structure, the whole department will need to be included in the conversation. Either way, the faculty who perform observations for summative purposes need to undergo preparation. This preparation should include developing an appreciation for how the department's teaching and learning values can be supported through a wide range of teaching strategies and styles. Another element of the preparation should be "norming," in which a group of would-be observers watch a video recorded teaching moment or review a document and then compare and discuss their respective evaluations.
- *Consider the type of instrument to be used*. In the next chapter there is a summary of this topic with suggestions that could be adapted to nearly any peer observation plan. Some use a "yes-no" scheme, in which the teaching values of the department have been represented as a set of teaching behaviors that are either present or not in a given instructor's practice. Others allow for scoring on a Likert scale. Others are more flexible still, inviting observers to look for classroom phenomena that represent preferred teaching values. Any of these can be effective as long as the goals, criteria and standards are clear. It will be necessary for your departmental faculty to decide how narrowly it wants to define effective teaching practices and how much interpretation to leave to the observer.
- *Consider how evaluations will be recorded and communicated both to the person being evaluated and to the administrators who need to know*. Summative evaluations can be sensitive and therefore should be handled with care and confidentiality. The process of gathering the results of the evaluation process, compiling them, and reporting them to the chair should be made explicit. The chair or chief administrator then communicates the conclusions to the evaluated faculty member as part of a larger evaluation process. Contrast the formal handling of summative assessment with the more personal handling of formative assessments.

Can the models used for formative assessment also work in summative assessment?
The two processes should work in tandem, so that the focal points of formative assessment are consistent with the focal points of summative assessment. The feedback a faculty member receives from colleagues during formative assessment should square with the criteria being used in summative assessment for the same department. The person being evaluated needs to see that the criteria and standards do not shift, so that the work he/she does as a result of formative feedback can be measured in the summative assessment process. For example, if a department puts great effort into encouraging its faculty members to adopt collaborative learning models because this model encourages student development consistent with the mission of the department, then the formal evaluation of teaching should be sure to address that primary value. It makes no sense to foster collaborative learning only to follow up with drop-in peer observations that measure only the quality of lectures.

Should the peer observers who participate in a faculty member's formative assessment also be involved in his/her summative assessment?
This overlap is not ideal, but sometimes it works just fine. Practically, depending on the size of your department, it may be unavoidable. At a minimum, every member of the department should be aware of the teaching and learning goals and practices expressed in the departmental mission, and receive training in evaluation that addresses those goals and practices. It is possible for the same peer to conduct both formative and summative assessment as long as the process that generates formative recommendations

is separated from the summative assessment. The level of detail sought in a formative assessment is typically too great for a summative assessment. Specific flaws uncovered in a formative assessment may not be relevant in a summative assessment. The faculty member needs to be confident that the formative assessment is not a definitive judgment.

Why can't the two processes take place simultaneously, using the same structures and formats?
The two processes have conflicting goals and therefore, at some point, diverge completely. The role of a faculty observer for the purpose of formative assessment is different from the role of a faculty observer for the purpose of summative evaluation. While the former is more closely and consciously aligned with the specific needs of the particular colleague being observed, the latter is more closely and consciously aligned with the teaching values of the department. In the best of all worlds, these two perspectives are very closely aligned, but administratively discrete. In politically healthy departments the distinction is less pronounced because the high level of faculty-to-faculty trust allows for the processes to overlap. But that's not the best case upon which to develop procedures to manage a high-stakes decision process. The careful separation of formative and summative processes helps ensure that summative assessment process can function even in a politically challenging environment of political dysfunction and distrust.

If we've never done peer assessment of teaching before, how do we start?

1. Have a structured departmental discussion of the teaching mission, based on student learning outcomes for your curriculum.
2. Identify the criteria and standards for effective teaching in your program or department. These should reflect what is stated in your mission and student learning outcomes.
3. Verify that a formative peer observation plan is in place (see Chapter IV), to ensure that the faculty have an opportunity to develop their teaching toward the mission. If there is not such a plan in place, stop consideration of a summative peer assessment process until a formative process exists.
4. Select or design mission-specific instruments and procedures to guide the evaluation process.
5. Prepare and train the faculty on how to conduct peer observations.
6. Decide on a procedure for collecting and communicating the results of the evaluations.

What difficulties will a department need to address in setting up a peer observation program for summative assessment?

1. Consensus on what constitutes "good teaching" will be difficult. The Eight Principles described in the Prologue can help foster an effective conversation about your department's teaching values.
2. Even well-meaning peers may not be consistent in their evaluations of colleagues.
3. Faculty reputations can bias an observation.
4. Peer observation should be only one part of a larger evaluation of teaching.
5. It is difficult to get faculty to undergo training on observing teaching.

VII. Choosing or Designing an Instrument to Guide Peer Observation

The purpose of a peer observation will determine the type of instrument that will be appropriate in conducting it. Instruments range from the highly restrictive to the open-ended, and any of them might be effective, depending on the given circumstances.

Types of Instruments
Three commonly-used instruments are checklists, Likert scale ratings, and ethnography-style observation.

A. Checklists
Checklists are the most prescriptive and restrictive. The list allows observers to indicate whether they observed a particular teaching behavior. Here are some sample items in an instrument of this sort.

1. Does the instructor use active learning techniques?
2. Do students have chances to apply concepts during class?

The assumption behind this type of instrument is that sound teaching behaviors lead to effective teaching. Using visual support, asking good questions, waiting for answers, calling on students by name: all of these have been shown through educational research to enhance student learning. An instructor who does these things, the logic goes, is doing a good job.

Of course, all of us have taken courses from highly effective teachers who had few (perhaps none) of the textbook behaviors associated with good teaching. And many of us have taken courses from highly ineffective teachers who serve as textbook examples of "good teaching behaviors." Sometimes, the way a teacher connects (or does not) with students cannot be fully explained by a set of teaching behaviors. Hence, the limitation of the checklist.

This does not mean we should simply reject the checklist as an instrument. In fact, the checklist can be very effective when used with other instruments, such as a written analysis (see below). While it may not tell the whole story, a checklist can be a good way to identify potential reasons for why a given instructor is effective or not. It is particularly good for a first-time observation or for troubleshooting a problematic situation. The data collected can point the observer to places to look for a more in-depth analysis. A wide representation of effective behaviors might help explain why a given instructor is successful; a dearth of those behaviors might help explain why an instructor is struggling. A sample checklist instrument can be found in Appendix C.

B. Likert scale ratings
These are by far the most common instruments used for peer observation, just as they are used for student evaluation of teaching. We do not recommend the use of a Likert scale instrument for formative purposes. These instruments can have a judgmental tone that may not be effective for giving feedback about teaching. If a Likert-style instrument is used, it needs to be accompanied by written analysis to ensure that the feedback received is informative rather than merely judgmental. A sample Likert scale instrument can be found in Appendix C.

C. Ethnography-style observation
In some cases, the function of the observation is to collect data from the classroom as a way of providing the communication basis between instructor and observer. An observer engaging in this process tries simply to capture as many salient details of the event as possible, as objectively as possible. This means transcribing or at least verbally sketching what happens during the class meeting. The resulting

document, which looks a bit like an ethnography, can be a powerful way of providing formative feedback to an instructor. The observer brings the document to the post-observation meeting and goes through it with the instructor. This allows for a conversation about specific choices the instructor made, and alternatives, if appropriate. A sample instrument of this type can be found in Appendix E.

Is the written analysis a superior instrument?

The written analysis requires more work on the part of the observer, but whether it is used as a stand-alone document or in accompaniment to other instruments, it is an essential piece of any peer observation. The analytical process conducted either through a checklist or a ratings instrument needs to be incorporated into a more holistic view, since sometimes the whole can be greater or less than the sum of its parts. The written analysis also allows the observer to address the instructor's goals for that particular session, which is a level of tailoring that the other instruments do not allow.

However, the written analysis is not merely an open-ended document, expressing an observer's opinion. It should be guided by the agreed-upon criteria (either the individual's or the department's), so as to structure a peer's observation and report.

Are any of these more appropriate for one type of assessment (formative) over the other (summative)?

Any of these instruments, with variations, can serve either type of process. Perhaps the most important thing to keep in mind is that for summative evaluation, in which careers are at stake, a combination of approaches is more likely to generate a valid and reliable evaluation.

Appendix A: The Peer Observation Process For Instructor Being Observed

1. *Inform your students that there will be a visitor observing the class before the day of the observation.* You want the day of an observation to be as "normal" as possible, so you want your students to be prepared for the presence of the observer and not feel uncomfortable.

2. *Meet with the observer at least a day before the scheduled class meeting.* The purpose of this meeting is for you to let your observer know as much as possible about your intentions for this class meeting and to identify your objectives. The discussion should create a context for the class to be observed and give you the opportunity to share any special information that your observer may need to understand what will be happening in class on the day of the observation. If the observer has not already seen it, bring a copy of your course syllabus and any other relevant materials to discuss during this meeting. Here are some questions you might want to be prepared to answer during this meeting:

    - How does this class fit into the course syllabus?
    - What are the specific goals of this class meeting?
    - How does this class meet one or more of the course objectives?
    - What happened in the previous class meeting?
    - What have the students done to prepare for this class?
    - What will you do in class? What methods and strategies will you use?
    - What would you like for me to focus on when I observe?
    - How would you like to receive feedback from me? *Make sure you take time to discuss and agree upon the observation instrument and type of feedback you would like the observer to provide.*

3. *Reflect on the class meeting.* Before you meet with your observer, take some time to think about your sense of how the class went. Ask yourself some questions:

    - What went well?
    - Where did your students seem to respond positively to what you were doing?
    - Where do you see evidence that you met your objectives for the class meeting?
    - What do you wish had worked better?

4. *Meet with the observer.* After you have been observed, make sure to take time to meet with the observer to discuss both of your perceptions of the class. Considering the reflective questions above will help you prepare for this meeting. Feel free to ask your observer questions about his/her perceptions of how students were responding to particular activities.

Appendix B: The Peer Observation Process <u>For Instructor Conducting Observation</u>

1. *Meet with the instructor of the class to be observed at least a day before the scheduled class meeting.* The purpose of this meeting is for you to learn as much as possible about the instructor's intentions and to identify his/her objectives. The discussion should create a context for the class to be observed. You should take time to look at the instructor's course syllabus and any other relevant materials before and/or during this meeting. You might want to ask the following questions about the class meeting you will be observing:

   - How does this class fit into the course syllabus?
   - What are the specific goals of this class meeting?
   - How does this class meet one or more of the course objectives?
   - What happened in the previous class meeting?
   - What have the students done to prepare for this class?
   - What will you do in class? What methods and strategies will you use?
   - What would you like for me to focus on when I observe?
   - How would you like to receive feedback from me? *Make sure you take time to discuss and agree upon the observation instrument and type of feedback you will provide the instructor.*

2. *Visit the class.* Arrive early and take a seat in an inconspicuous part of the room. Bring a watch and a note pad as well as any observation instrument/form you will be completing during the observation. The most important thing to remember about the class visit is that your primary goal is to observe and record as accurately as possible the events that transpire. Consider it your job to write an "ethnography" rather than an evaluation. Take the point of view of a student in the class, and try to make observations that reflect the learning, rather than the teaching, process.

   No matter what kind of observation instrument you are using, focus on recording what the *students* see, hear, say, and do. Also record what the instructor does, but do so from the student's perspective.

3. *Reflect on your experience as an observer.* Reread your notes and identify several items that you can discuss with the observed instructor. You should include things that went well and that you will want to reinforce in your post-observation meeting. You should also identify places where you could make constructive suggestions for changes in how the class was managed.

   If you are using any kind of checklist or observation form, it might also be useful for yourself and the instructor being observed to construct a summary narrative of your comments.

4. *Meet with the observed instructor.* Start by asking the instructor how he/she felt about the class. Was it a typical class? Were the objectives reached? What went well? What would he/she have liked to improve?

   Keep in mind that an important goal of the observation is to give the instructor a snapshot of his/her class—free of judgment. Offer to read sections of your notes where interesting, particularly good, or problematic things occurred. Your ability to recapture the class in detail helps your credibility as an observer. The transcript will also give you something concrete to use if you wish to demonstrate an important point about a moment of the class.

   Make sure that you indicate to the observed instructor the things that worked. Then limit your suggestions or recommendations for change to just a few. Too many suggestions may leave the instructor less confident as a teacher and uncertain about what to change.

Appendix C: Peer Observation Checklist

Instructor ______________________ Course ______________________

Observer ______________________ Date ______________________

Teaching behavior	Behavior observed? (Y/N)	Comments
Instructor clearly communicates the purpose of class session and instructional activities.		
Instructor uses concrete examples and illustrations that clarify the material.		
Instructor uses a variety of activities to ensure all students are engaged.		
Instructor challenges students to think analytically.		
Instructor uses activities in class to determine whether students understand course material.		
Instructor fosters student-to-student interaction.		
Instructor links new material to previously learned concepts.		
Instructor uses visuals and handouts where appropriate to accompany verbal presentation.		
Instructor requires students to be active (e.g., completing a task, applying concepts, or engaging in discussion instead of passively listening).		
Students are comfortable asking questions.		

Students actively participate in class activities and discussions.		
Students are able to connect course material to other relevant topics.		

Additional Comments/Observations

Appendix D: Likert Scale Rating Peer Observation Form

Instructor ______________________ Course ______________________

Observer ______________________ Date ______________________

SA = Strongly Agree A = Agree D = Disagree SD = Strongly Disagree NA = Not Applicable

1. Students are exposed to major concepts/principles in the field. *Comments:*	SA	A	D	SD	NA
2. Instructor clearly communicates the purpose of class session and instructional activities. *Comments:*	SA	A	D	SD	NA
3. Instructor uses examples and illustrations that help clarify the topic being discussed. *Comments:*	SA	A	D	SD	NA
4. Instructor inspires student interest in the subject matter. *Comments:*	SA	A	D	SD	NA
5. Instructor notes and responds to signs of student puzzlement. *Comments:*	SA	A	D	SD	NA
6. Instructor notes and responds to signs of student boredom. *Comments:*	SA	A	D	SD	NA
7. Instructor provides opportunities for students to bring up relevant issues. *Comments:*	SA	A	D	SD	NA
8. Instructor manages classroom discussions effectively. *Comments:*	SA	A	D	SD	NA

9. Instructor facilitates discussions among students, not just between instructor and students. *Comments:*	SA	A	D	SD	NA
10. Instructor uses a variety of teaching activities. *Comments:*	SA	A	D	SD	NA
11. Instructor presents activities and materials appropriate for students' level of experience and ability. *Comments:*	SA	A	D	SD	NA
12. Instructor demonstrates that the course material is important and has real-world relevance. *Comments:*	SA	A	D	SD	NA
13. Instructor challenges students to think analytically. *Comments:*	SA	A	D	SD	NA

Summary Comments:

Appendix E: Ethnography-Style Peer Observation

Instructor ______________________ Course ________________________

Observer ______________________ Date ________________________

Time	What teacher is doing	What students are doing

Balance of Use of Time (Teacher/Student Activity)

Highlights of effective moments

Additional Comments/Suggestions