Old Dogs, New Tricks: Using Teaching Observations for Faculty Annual Review

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This process can be “mysterious, frustrating, and frightening... high stakes” (Weiser 646).
Increased Work Potential for Biased Observations

Improved Collegiality & Awareness of Effective Pedagogy

SACSCOC Principles of Accreditation (Section 6: Faculty) require the “quality and integrity” of “the learning enterprise” through “appropriate content and pedagogy.”

Department’s Benefits

- Actually talk about teaching
- Mentoring
- Getting to know each other better
- Integrating Revision Ideas
Rationale for Change

“We had no way of knowing what goes on in the classroom.”

(Oct. 12, 2018, dept. meeting notes)

“…classroom observation can be a means for improving instruction” (Cohen and McKeachie 152).
Concerns as we established the program?

Proposal for Departmental Evaluation of Teaching
COMPOSITION OF THE TEACHING REVIEW COMMITTEE

- 5 members (at least 3 are tenured and 1 is a full professor)
- 3 year terms
- Rotation on/off is staggered for continuity and consistency
- No department chair, but chair has access to materials

New Evaluation Requirements

- a 1-2 page reflection on teaching and evaluation
- a brief teaching resumé
- two Pre-Observation Forms
- two Post-Observation Reports
- syllabi and course outlines
- student evaluations
Procedures

Classroom Observation Requirements

- Two tenured faculty members per calendar year
- One observation each semester
• Pre-observation report by observee
• Pre-observation meeting
• Observation
• Post-observation meeting
• Jointly-written summative report of the observation

• One lottery-chosen observer
• One observee-chosen observer
• The second tenured faculty member can accept or decline
• Second observer can be lottery-chosen instead

• Faculty members choose course and class period
• Each semester should evaluate different courses
Calendar Year Model rather than Academic Year

Pre-Observation Form
Description of Course:
• Course Context
• Objectives
• Preparation
• Strategies

Aspects of Teaching to be Observed:
• Classroom Management
• Instructional Coherence
• Subject Mastery
• Teaching Strategies Used
• Instructor Attitudes and Characteristics

Pre-Observation Meeting
Meet at least one day before the observed class

Provide observers with materials

Observation
Observers
- Reflect
- Reread
- Include positives
- Consider recommendations

Post-Observation Meeting

- Meet within one week of the observation
- Start with general observations from the observee
- Give the instructor a snapshot of the class
- Indicate the things that worked
- Limit suggestions or recommendations
Post-Observation Report

Jointly-written Post-Observation Report:

A 500-1000 word summative report should include

- A brief overview of the class proceedings
- A commentary on the observee-identified three aspects of teaching
- A summary recommendation of meets or does not meet expectations for teaching

- Signed hard copy and electronic copy
- Within two weeks of the observation

Instructor observed ___________________

Course and section observed ___________________

Date and time of visit ___________________

Current Enrollment # ___________________

Number of students present ___________________

Peer observers _______________________ ___________________

I. Brief overview of class

II. Three aspects of teaching

III. Additional Observations

IV. Summary & Recommendation
The Teaching Review Committee assesses the following holistically:
- the reports,
- the 1-2 page reflection,
- the teaching resume,
- the syllabi, and
- student evaluations.

The candidate “meets expectations” or “does not meet expectations” for teaching excellence.

Results

“...both observers and observees reported...that their own teaching improved as a result of their participation” (Millman 24).
Concerns as we implemented the program?
Scenario with Potential for Problems:

Professor Unenthused (Lottery Chosen) = PU

Docile Observer (Candidate Chosen) = DOC
Consequences?

Consequences?
A vulnerable, untenured faculty member

The results can be disastrous for faculty in the middle of their tenure and/or promotion process.
The course itself, its content, and/or its delivery method... are issues over which the Observee may have little to no control.

“It is difficult... to be non-defensive about the quality of one’s teaching, a role that requires so much personal involvement” (Cohen & McKeachie 153).

Appeals Process
If the observation is unfair, inaccurate, or reflective of an unusually unrepresentative teaching performance:

- Submit a written response
- Request another observation by different observers

SACSCOC 2018 Principles of Accreditation require "regular evaluation of faculty members, regardless of contract or tenure status" (Principle 6.3).
Iqbal (2014) found that “reviewers rarely gave feedback to candidates, and when they did, comments were typically vague and/or focused on the positive” (108).

Iqbal’s concern about “lack of pedagogical experience” (108) is not an issue in my department but could be for other departments.
Inexperienced or Resistant Observers (PU) issues can be solved by Alternate Observations.

Professionalism
Compassion
Adherence to Academic Rigor & Standards
Desire to Improve One’s Own Teaching

Faculty wait much too long in the semester to schedule observations and related meetings.
Unanticipated Settings

| Asynchronous Online Teaching | Synchronous Online Teaching | Hybrid Online & F-t-F Teaching |

“While faculty will always experience a degree of discomfort when being evaluated, it is important for them to know that the procedures used in an evaluation are fair” (Cohen & McKeachie 153).

Other options?
External reviewers
Return to The Blue Box
Better pedagogical training for observers

Future Steps

Observe post-tenure faculty
Review the process, especially the validity and reliability of results
“...[peer review] is itself subject to review and critique and revision—including by the faculty it impacts—and therein lies its strength” (Weiser 670).

Recommendations

Welcome
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