

General Guidelines for Peer Observation: For Instructor Conducting Observation

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? (i.e., What kind of observation instrument would you prefer that I use?)

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 to demonstrate a point you wish to make 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.