IN-CLASS OBSERVATION OF TEACHING GUIDELINES

Context
The intent of observations is to record impressions of an instructor’s teaching practices. The aim includes observing:

- How an instructor conducts his/her class – this includes its structure, organization and time use, teaching premises and pedagogical assumptions.

- How an instructor interacts with the students – openness to questions, responsiveness, tone and facilitation capacities.

- How an instructor presents materials – this extends beyond the lecture to include learning goals for the class, connections between these goals and the lecture, and the organization and appropriate use of supporting technology and/or aids (e.g., projectors, power-point, class handouts, in-class activities).

- Teaching observations should include reviews of materials (e.g., in-class assignments, transparencies, power point slides) to evaluate their usefulness for helping students to learn (e.g., effectiveness of an in-class activity or lecture). This review should also include reviews of the syllabi to appropriately locate the specific class and/or topic being observed. Refer to Appendix 1 on guidelines for reviewing syllabi.

Such observations are part of peer or collegial review of teaching, and can be used for both improvement/developmental, and evaluative/summative evaluations of teaching.

The information on conducting in-class observation of teaching contained in this document has been developed in consultation with Lana Rae Lenz, Center for Instructional Research (CIDR), UW Seattle (June, 2010), as well as derived from CIDR resources on in-class observations.

Focus for Observation and Issues for (Potential) Feedback

<table>
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<tr>
<th>AREAS TO OBSERVE AND FEEDBACK ON</th>
<th>COMPONENTS TO FOCUS ON FOR OBSERVATION</th>
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| How an instructor conducts his/her class | • Structuring of class – Is the class organized and well structured?  
• Organization and use of time – Is sufficient time allotted for the various activities planned? Too little time? Too much time?  
• Class pace – Is information being communicated too fast? Any input or questions solicited from students? Clarity of |

Refer to Appendix 1 on guidelines for reviewing syllabi.
How an instructor interacts with the students

- **Classroom dynamics (student to student interactions)** – Are these respectful? Do students interact well with each other? Tone or actions of instructor reinforcing/influencing one or the other (e.g., supports courtesy, disregards disruptions)?
- **Classroom dynamics (faculty to student interactions)** – Openness to questions? Responsiveness? Tone? Paraphrasing?

How an instructor presents materials

- **Organization of content** – Good flow and logic to way content is forwarded? Adequate coverage of content? Appropriate pedagogy and teaching premises?
- **Link to learning goals** – Is the content covered linked to the learning goals for the topic?
- **Use of visuals, technology and other teaching aid/material** – Any reliance on these? Is the selection of technological and other teaching aids (e.g., cases, in-class assignments or activities) effective and appropriate?

Teaching observations should include reviews of materials (e.g., in-class assignments, transparencies, power point slides, text chapter) and course syllabi

- **Preparation prior to observation** [see below on “Process”]

### Process

1. The instructor should send his/her *syllabus* and *other relevant course material* (e.g., handouts, in-class activities/assignments) to the observing colleague and administrator before the pre-observation meeting [and observation day] to provide an appropriate context for the report on classroom observation. Refer to guidelines for reviewing syllabi in Appendix 1.

2. A pre-observation meeting between the instructor and colleague as well as administrator should be held to provide and get more information about:
   (a) the course
   (b) students
   (c) goals for the observation

More information about preparing for class observations for observers and instructors can be accessed at the following CIDR link:
3. Observation [see “focus for observation” above for items to focus on]. CIDR’s sample note-taking form for classroom observations can be accessed via the following: http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/resources/observation-notes.pdf

4. A post-observation meeting should be arranged between the instructor and colleague as well as administrator to discuss and interpret the observers’ questions and notes on the class observed. This is undertaken to ensure that notes or questions connected to what was observed can be clarified by the observing colleague and administrator. For more information on CIDR’s post-observation meeting guidelines, go to: http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/resources/post-observation.html#

5. During this post-observation meeting, the observer(s) work with the instructor to suggest and develop strategies to build on identified strengths, and to address areas needing change. As in the above, go to CIDR’s post-observation meeting guidelines for more information: http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/resources/post-observation.html#

**Observation Write-Up (for evaluative/summative purposes and official hand-in)**

For evaluative/summative purposes, write-ups of the formal observation document should include information on:

1. Instructor, Course, Section, Quarter and Date of Observation
2. Purpose of Observation (e.g., required/not required, official purpose, specific interests of the instructor)
3. Name of Observer and Title (e.g., professor, administrator)
4. Context – class, location of topic/class observed in the course schedule, aims (e.g., administrative, procedural requirement, instructor interests); include pre-observation meeting details
5. Notations from observation
6. Brief overview of post-observation meeting and summary of questions and strategies discussed to build on strengths and address areas needing change.
7. Overall assessment of observation and post-observation decisions.
REFERENCES:

CIDR Resources

Classroom Observation
http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/resources/observationtools.html

Peer review of Teaching
http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/consulting/peer-review.html

Teaching and Learning Bulletin, 1(4)
http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/Bulletin/ClassroomObservation.html#

Sample Classroom Observation Note-taking Format

Post-Observation Meeting Guidelines:
http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/resources/post-observation.html#
APPENDIX 1

GUIDELINES FOR REVIEWING COURSE SYLLABI

Characteristics of an Effective and Pedagogically Sound Course Outline

An effective and pedagogically sound course outline should explicitly make the connections between course objectives, departmental aims, and the university’s mission statement; and establish clear relationships between course objectives, student assessment, and evaluations of teaching effectiveness.

The syllabus should:
- Articulate specific aims and objectives for a course in the field
- Identify the relationship between course objectives, course content, and sequencing of material
- Demonstrates how teaching effectiveness is related to student assessment and course objectives
- States clearly defined mutual expectations
- Is clear, coherent and comprehensive

Source:

For a list of other CIDR recommended resources on designing effective courses and syllabi, refer to the list resources at the end of this Appendix.

Focus of Syllabus Review and Feedback

- Are aims and objectives for the course clearly articulated?
- Are these aims linked to the learning objectives of the School?
- Do relationships exist between course objectives, content, and sequencing of material?
- Do assessments of students fit with stated course objectives?
- Are schedules of topics and readings clearly outlined?
- Are assignments, projects and exams and their weights clearly stipulated?
- Are other mutual expectations clearly stated?
- Is the course outline clear, coherent and comprehensive?
- Are required School and University service information included?
References

CIDR Resources


CIDR Recommended Course Design Resources (a selection)

Books


Websites
CIDR’s “Course Design” website
http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/resources/designtools.html

“Designing Effective and Innovative Courses” – Course Design Tutorial, Science Education Resource Center, Carleton College
http://serc.carleton.edu/NAGTWorkshops/coursedesign/tutorial/index.html

“Planning a Distance Learning Course”, Learning and Scholarly Technologies
http://www.washington.edu/lst/help/planning/dl_planning

http://ctl.stanford.edu/Newsletter/designing_courses.pdf

“Objectively Speaking” Richard Felder and Rebecca Brent

Podcasts
Center for Teaching Podcasts – Vanderbilt University
http://blogs.vanderbilt.edu/cftpodcast/?m=201001

“CAT Food (for Thought)” – Center for Advancement of Teaching, Xavier University Conversations on teaching
http://cat.xula.edu/food/topic/podcast/