

Peer Review of Teaching I:

Why do we engage in peer review of teaching?

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Peer Review of Teaching as a Concept

Peer review of teaching is a process through which peers, often department chairs or senior colleagues, review the teaching of their colleagues, who are often more junior. Though we often think of the peer review process as including only in-class observations, it can include much more than that, especially in circumstances where remote teaching is occurring, or there are fewer synchronous sessions to observe. Peer review can also include review of curricula vitae, student evaluations, self-evaluative statements, and other evidence such as syllabi, LMS pages, assignments, student work, and letters solicited from former students.

It is also worth noting a common distinction between two very different forms of peer review: **formative** and **summative**. **Formative evaluation** typically is oriented solely towards the improvement of teaching and is part of instructional mentorship and development. **Summative evaluation**, in contrast, is that done to inform personnel decisions.

Why is peer review useful? Among the many reasons, here are a few:

- It **reduces the heavy reliance on student evaluations** as a primary form of evaluating teaching. Students are not experts in pedagogy, and their evaluations are prone to bias, particularly toward women and people of color.
- It **provides an additional metric for understanding teaching effectiveness**. As is the case for all complex variables, there are many measures that help us understand something as complicated as effective teaching.
- In the short-term and long-term peer review of teaching can **improve faculty teaching**.
- Peer review of teaching can **create a dialogue between the observer and the teacher**. This is beneficial for the individual teachers involved, as well as the broader teaching culture.

Though peer review of teaching can, at times, help correct biases that student evaluations might present, it has **weaknesses** itself. **Peer reviews can demonstrate bias**. As reviewers have relationships with those they observe, and these relationships can color perceptions of teaching. Peer reviews also only represent a small segment of the work that goes into teaching. **Additional review of teaching materials** and portfolios can provide a

much fuller picture of a teacher. This is why peer review is just one, of many, valuable tools for helping evaluate teaching.

Though many of us are concerned about how peer review might operate **during the Fall 2020 semester, with many remote or hybrid courses**, the same general principles above apply. The “technique” of peer review might differ, including observations on Zoom, review of Moodle content rather than other documents. But the aspects of teaching to examine and what to include in your peer review are likely to be largely the same.

Resources Consulted:

- <https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/peer-review-of-teaching/>
- <https://www.elon.edu/u/academics/catl/tlresources/assess-student-learning/peer-observation-of-teaching/>