

Peer Review of Teaching II:

Recommended Strategies and Approaches for Peer Review

Center for Teaching and Learning

Jordan D. Troisi, Ph.D., Senior Associate Director of the CTL

jdtroisi@colby.edu

Strategies and Approaches for Peer Review

There are many considerations for us to make when considering how departments and programs might approach the process of peer review. We first recommend that departments and programs give consideration to how they have **selected and communicated goals and standards**. Departments and programs should seek to establish a clear set of learning goals for their students. These goals can provide a framework for what it means to teach successfully, thereby providing a more transparent way of developing and evaluating teaching practices. Articulating these learning goals to teachers also **reduces the likelihood of bias in the review process**: teachers know what goals they are striving for, and reviewers know the guidelines for success.

How should reviewers approach Peer Review?

Faculty wear many hats, and may thus take on many dispositions in how they approach their work. What type of disposition should they adopt and what information should they have in mind when engaging in peer review?

- Reviewers should have **contextual and institutional experience**, such as information about the department and institutional goals.
- Reviewers should commit to **integrity, fair-mindedness, privacy, and an open-minded understanding** of the reasons why the teacher under review has made the choices they have made about teaching.
- Reviewers should make an effort to **establish trust**, and a **transparent process** about how the review will occur.
- Reviewers should orient their review toward **helpful, behavior-oriented feedback** that will help the teacher improve.
- Reviewers should commit to a **thorough and practical approach**, representing all phases of the processes associated with teaching (e.g., preparation, selection of teaching approach, reflection).

What steps should be included as a part of the Peer Review process?

As a part of the review process, we recommend **three primary phases or steps** be taken. **First, a preliminary interview or discussion should occur between the reviewers and the teacher being reviewed**. This is an opportunity to inform the teacher being reviewed about the process and to allow them to have input on what is about to transpire. It also allows the reviewer to gain valuable contextual information about the course(s) and teacher being reviewed. During this interview or discussion, we recommend the reviewer identify any processes or tools they will use as a part of the peer observation. This discussion can occur in person, or remotely through a program such as Zoom.

Second, observation of class periods will occur (or asynchronous content as well as methods of teacher-student interaction). If possible, more observations are preferred, as individual snapshots do not provide the full picture of a teacher. There are many things to observe associated with teaching, but we urge consideration of a broad range of topics, including:

- Content knowledge
- Use of instructional materials
- Class organization and clarity
- Presentation form and substance
- Teacher-student interactions
- Participation, climate, and environment
- Engagement and active learning
- Learning goals and expectations
- Assessment practices and feedback to students
- Support of effective learning practices (e.g., building on students' prior knowledge, reasoning, critical thinking)

Third, a follow up discussion and report based on the observation. This provides an opportunity to inform or discuss the class period(s), and to gain further understanding about how the class operated. This discussion can occur in person, or remotely through a program such as Zoom.

Feedback provided in the discussion and report should be:

- Manageable and focused on a few priorities, ideally actionable ones;
- Balanced between constructive criticism and praise;
- Based on specific observed information, not an instructor's personality traits or presumed intentions;
- Candid in approach, meaning descriptive but not judgmental.

Additional considerations, particularly for asynchronous and remote teaching

Perhaps especially because the full picture of effective teaching is harder to judge when not in person, it can also be valuable to consider other artifacts that would inform a reviewer about teaching effectiveness. These include **aspects of course design and asynchronous involvement**, as well as **evidence of student learning**.

Aspects of course design and asynchronous involvement

Though the traditional in-class experience can tell us much about teaching, other aspects of our teaching practice can have a significant influence on student learning and the student experience in a course. We strongly consider examination of features of how courses are designed, especially when courses are meeting remotely or asynchronously. Among them, some might include:

- Review of the layout and organization of the course Moodle site
- The design, length, and presentation features of asynchronous lessons or activities completed independently by students
- Effective use of discussion forums (e.g., question design, interaction with student posts, assessment guidelines)

Evidence of student learning

The ultimate end goal of effective teaching is effective student learning. Though we may often rely on observation in the classroom to tell us if effective student learning is occurring, there are many other ways for a peer reviewer to ascertain how effectively students are learning (both in remote circumstances, and in face-to-face circumstances). Here are some examples that might be worth examining:

- End-of-course student work, such as examinations, written work, and other projects.

- Student work throughout the course, such as formative assessments of learning (and how they might relate to later summative assessments). Student improvement or progress can also be examined.
- Student grades, as an indicator of student performance, when accompanied by contextual information such as grade distribution, criteria used to assign grades, samples of student work at various levels, and degrees of improvement for students.
- More holistic pieces of evidence of student learning, some of which might not be contained to a single class experience. These might include advising activity, student mentorship, and other student partnerships.

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/>