

Peer Observation Team for *Formative* Assessment of Teaching In the College of Pharmacy

Background – The intent of this proposal is to create within the College a structured process for peer assessment of teaching, first and foremost as a mechanism for supporting faculty development (at all ranks), but also to provide one mechanism (if faculty choose to use it) to satisfy College and University requirements for peer review of teaching for promotion and post-tenure review.

This proposal originated with the College’s “Teaching Conversations” group in Fall-04 as a structured mechanism for both formative and summative peer assessment of teaching,¹ and as a substantial policy change on peer assessment for the College. The proposal was forwarded to the Faculty Development Committee (FDC) for implementation, and revised by the Peer Evaluation Task Force of the FDC in Spring-05 to specify the frequency of assessments depending on faculty rank, title, and percentage appointment. Following extensive discussion at the August-05 retreat, the proposal was rejected by the faculty and returned to the FDC for review and revision.

This proposal is a substantial departure from the original proposal. First, there are no suggested changes in policy from current College requirements for peer assessment according to rank,² or any specifications beyond current University requirements for peer assessment associated with promotion of either tenure track or non-tenure track faculty.³

¹ The term ‘formative’ is used in this proposal to represent collegial input with the intent of helping faculty improve his/her teaching through the iterative process of peer observation and feedback, reflection on that feedback, and implementation of improved teaching strategies or methods. The term ‘summative’ assessment, *which is not the intent of this proposal*, implies a capstone assessment of the faculty member’s teaching, and would thus be expected to reflect improved teaching through use of the formative process.

² Frequency specified in the adopted (1992) College of Pharmacy Faculty Teaching Brochure: “All faculty are subject to peer review. The following minimum frequency for such reviews is as follows: *Assistant professors* - every year, starting with the person’s second year; *Associate professors* - at least once every three years but at least two peer evaluations prior to being considered for promotion to full professor, each done in different years; *Professors* - at least once every three to five years.”

³ From the University’s Tenure-Track and Non-Tenure Track Promotion Guidelines (2005): Peer evaluation/observation reports. These reports are broad evaluations of the candidate’s effectiveness as a teacher at the graduate and/or undergraduate levels by those faculty members conducting the in-class observations. The reports should cover such elements as presentation, course content, organization, clarity of written materials, rigor and fairness of written examinations, and student outcomes. Reports of all in-class observations while in rank are to be included in the dossier. Peer observations of classes should be conducted periodically for all faculty members but not later than the spring semester preceding the fall in which a candidate for promotion expects to be reviewed. The budget council is to consider the peer observations in their assessment of the candidate’s teaching service record. Each peer evaluation/observation report is to (1) be dated; (2) identify the faculty member(s) conducting the (continues footnote next page)

Second, this proposal focuses exclusively on *formative* (rather than *summative*) assessment, regardless of the rank of the faculty member being assessed. Third, *use* of the Peer Observation Team for teaching assessment (as well as *servicing* on the Team) is entirely voluntary. Fourth, since there are no policy changes involved, this recommendation would go directly to the Dean from the Faculty Development Committee for approval and implementation; no faculty vote is required.

“Peer Observation Team” for Teaching Assessment – The Peer Observation Team will consist of a panel of faculty volunteers (tenure track, non-tenure track, any rank) who are willing to serve in teaching assessment of their colleagues. *Formative* feedback for any faculty member could be provided by one or two team members, as the faculty member being evaluated desires. The availability of this committed Team as a College resource to help faculty improve teaching in no way precludes any faculty member from using other methods they feel appropriate for obtaining *formative* feedback on their teaching. This Team simply represents one option for faculty to choose. The Peer Observation Team would be coordinated by the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs to select appropriate faculty for the reviews and to ensure equitable distribution of workload within the team. The faculty member being evaluated will be provided a list of members on the Peer Observation Team, and will work with the Coordinator in determining the final member(s) to conduct the formative assessment.

Criteria for the Team – Faculty members who are willing to participate as a team member would be expected to commit to the following:

1. CTE⁴ training workshop on peer assessment of teaching.
2. Willingness to evaluate teaching when called upon, and willingness to have their teaching evaluated by the same process.
3. Willing to use a standardized form for assessment.
4. Willing to provide the candidate a written report and verbal review of the assessment.

Components of the Review – While the majority of ‘peer evaluation’ literature (including the CTE document “Preparing for Peer Observation” that we relied on) focuses on didactic teaching (lecturing), it is recognized that a variety of teaching modalities are utilized in the College within the professional curriculum and graduate instruction (e.g., lectures, facilitated case-based laboratories, practice laboratories, etc.). While precepting students and individualized supervision of graduate students are clearly important components of College’s teaching mission, peer assessment in these types of

classroom observation of teaching, the number and title of the course observed, the date(s) of the observation(s); and (3) explain the methods of observation and inquiry used. ***Observers are to sign their observation reports.*** Information on how to conduct a peer classroom observation is available on the Division of Instructional Innovation and Assessment’s Web page at:

<http://www.utexas.edu/academic/cte/PeerObserve>.

⁴ Center for Teaching Effectiveness (in the Division of Instructional Innovation and Assessment, DIIA).

environments was considered to be outside the scope of this proposal, and should be addressed separately.

Thus, although the term ‘lecture/lab’ is used below, it is expected that the assessment components listed would be modified to provide the most appropriate review of the teaching approach being evaluated. Components for the review might include (but are not limited to):

1. The peer evaluator’s attendance/review of lecture/lab.
2. Evaluation of lecture(s)/lab(s) using a standardized CTE form [CTE form for lectures (appended); lab evaluation form(s) to be determined by a meeting of lab coordinators].
3. Review of handouts/notes related to the lecture/lab coverage.
4. Review of the objectives related to the lecture/lab coverage.
5. Review of exam questions related to the lecture/lab coverage.
6. Review of exam stats and student performance related to lecture/lab coverage.
7. Review of the faculty member’s understanding of their lecture/lab “in context” of the rest of the course (i.e., what came before; what comes after).
8. Review of support materials provided students for the lecture/lab (Blackboard®, tutorials, problem sets, etc).

In addition, the faculty member may want to ask the Team to review other components of their teaching efforts, including (but not limited to):

9. The faculty member’s current teaching philosophy statement and how it has evolved based on his/her experiences, as well as student and peer feedback.
10. Previous student evaluations.
11. Previous peer evaluations.
12. A list of peer classes faculty have attended to explore the approaches used by his/her colleagues. Junior faculty members are encouraged to attend other faculty members’ lectures/labs, not only to improve their own teaching by observing their colleagues, but to participate in the peer review process (see #16 below).
13. Evaluation of course packet(s) or handouts including course (or lecture) objectives.
14. Program evaluations relating to the course.
15. Other efforts by the faculty member to improve his/her teaching (e.g., attendance at workshops, conferences, self-assessment and reflection, including peer feedback from such presentations);
16. Efforts by the faculty member to help improve the *teaching of colleagues* (e.g., serving as a member on the peer assessment team, DIIA presentations at the New Faculty and at the Experienced Faculty Annual Workshops, etc.).

For a *formative* assessment, a minimum of a single lecture and any of the associated components described above may be sufficient (by agreement with the faculty member involved). Note that the University guidelines for promotion and tenure *require* a teaching portfolio of all faculty members being considered for promotion. Review of that

portfolio by the College's Executive Committee is an essential part of the review process. That portfolio could be improved by inclusion of a number of the components above.

In addition to the process outlined herein, faculty members should avail themselves of the extensive services provided by the Center for Teaching Effectiveness (CTE), including in-class assessment, for formative teaching observation and feedback (however, it should be understood that this does not satisfy the University requirements for "peer" observation).⁵ Faculty should feel free to secure any additional feedback from colleagues, including informal feedback, to help improve their teaching.

Frequency of Peer Assessments - Since this proposal does not change current policy in terms of *frequency* of peer evaluation, and since use of the Peer Observation Team is entirely voluntary, there is no specified frequency of use. However, these are considered *formative* evaluations, and so it is highly recommended that junior faculty avail themselves of this College resource on a routine (yearly) basis for the purpose of faculty development.

Faculty Requirements - Since this proposal does not change current policy in terms of peer review as it relates to *faculty rank*, and since use of the Peer Observation Team is entirely voluntary, there is no specified requirements according to faculty rank. However, these are considered *formative* evaluations, and so it is (again) highly recommended that junior faculty avail themselves of this College resource on a routine (yearly) basis for the purpose of faculty development.

Reports – For the *formative* assessment, the evaluator(s) is (are) expected to provide the faculty member the completed standardized form and conduct a 'completion interview'. As confirmed by the Provost, the information provided to the faculty member relating to *formative* evaluation is considered a "collegial communication" between faculty peers, and is used at the discretion of the faculty member (e.g., inclusion in the teaching portfolio is the faculty member's call). Therefore, all members of the Peer Observation Team are required to maintain confidentiality of their findings; it is the faculty member being evaluated that has control over the use of the results.

Use of This Process for Summative Reviews – As stated above, members of the Peer Observation Team are volunteering their time to conduct *formative*, collegial evaluations of teaching for the purpose of faculty development. That effort mandates *candid, constructive feedback*. If a faculty member chooses to use the results of these reviews as evidence of a summative (capstone) review, that is his or her prerogative; however, the decision to do so will not change either the nature of the process or the resultant report.

⁵ Provost Sheldon Ekland-Olson, August 26, 2005.