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COMMITTEE ON TEACHING  
BERKELEY DIVISION, ACADEMIC SENATE

GUIDE TO PEER REVIEW OF COURSE INSTRUCTION

Peer review of course instruction is one source of data about teaching. Berkeley's Evaluation of Teaching Policy (1987) details:

“The candidate’s faculty colleagues who have appropriate expertise in the discipline are best able to evaluate the scholarship that informs the design and organization of courses and curriculum, the choice or development of texts and other instructional materials (syllabus, handouts, etc.), the nature of examinations and assignments, and so on” (p. 2).

Although departments may use peer review in a number of different ways, the Committee on Teaching recommends consistency in application of the regulations set forth in the Evaluation of Teaching Policy (1987) regarding peer review. Peer review is an opportunity to help colleagues think about their teaching, maintain their strengths, and improve their teaching.

If a department determines to utilize peer review of course instruction, peer review form templates are available through the Center for Teaching and Learning (<http://teaching.berkeley.edu>) and may be adapted as needed.

In order to ensure that faculty benefit from the peer review of course instruction, adding value to their teaching practice and serving as valid evidence of their teaching effectiveness, the following best practices are suggested:

*For departments*

- Instructors are informed about the purpose of the peer review of course instruction.
- A Peer Review Form is used to guide the observation and evaluation to focus on agreed upon pedagogical practices.
- A Pre-Review Form completed by the instructor and sent to the peer reviewer, is used to prepare them for the class session with any relevant information (i.e., learning goals, student dynamics).
- Peer Review Forms are completed according to the form’s directions.
- An opportunity is provided to instructors to comment/remark in response to the peer review.
- Experience performing peer reviews (plus training and support where appropriate) increases reliability and validity of the reviews.

*For peer reviewers*

- Try not to affect the teaching-learning process. Be invisible.
- Have a method of recording what takes place.
- Arrive at class ahead of time.
- Note the time in the margin of the review form every few minutes so that the class structure can be put in context.
- Diagram instructor and student positions and interactions illustrating the degree of participation, who participates in class and how often.

- Observe an entire class session. If you must leave, make sure the instructor knows beforehand.
- Do not intervene in the teaching during the observation. As exception, only intervene by explicit prior agreement with the instructor.
- Provide feedback that,
  - is accurate and specific, with examples. “33% of students raised hands to answer instructor question” rather than “students appear engaged and responsive” or “Instructor voice trailed off while summarizing concept #3 at 3:45” rather than “instructor mannerism is distracting or confusing.”
  - contributes to what the instructor has already thought about (dovetails with Pre-Review Form information and instructor self-knowledge).
  - is given in a supportive, nonjudgmental manner.
  - has positives intermixed with areas for growth.
  - provides specific alternatives for teaching practices needing change or improvement.
  - is sensitive to what the instructor can control, their experience level.
  - prompts discussion between the instructor and reviewer.
- Conduct a post-review discussion with the instructor. In a post-review discussion,
  - begin by discussing what the instructor is doing well, and why.
  - provide specific examples which are more useful than generalities.

For instructors

- Take the first opportunity to comment in a post-review discussion, before the reviewer does. Frame your own impression of the class, where you felt your strengths shown through and areas you are actively seeking suggestions for improvement. This will help guide the feedback from the reviewer and set the stage for a discussion.
- Informed by the results of the current peer review of course instruction, articulate pedagogical goals to accomplish by the next peer review of course instruction and outline concrete steps to reach those goals. The summary section in the Peer Review Form template provides a designated space for this actionable plan, among other items.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the peer review – as a source of evidence of teaching effectiveness and an opportunity for reflection/discussion around maintaining strengths and improving teaching. The summary section in the Peer Review Form template provides a designated space for this evaluation, among other items.

For reviewers & instructors

- Conduct an honest exchange, of both strengths and suggestions for improving teaching.
- Treat the post-review meeting as a discussion, not just the reviewer delivering feedback.