

TO: The Faculty Senate
The University of Texas at El Paso

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DATE: November 19, 2013

SUBJECT: Recommended Policy on Faculty Peer Observation of Teaching

The Teaching Effectiveness and Development Committee was charged to **develop a university policy regarding faculty peer observation of teaching**, including suggested guidelines for implementation and template form.

Active pursuit of teaching excellence is a hallmark of national research universities and a priority at UTEP. Like learning any skill, becoming an excellent teacher takes instruction, practice, and feedback. This policy proposal focuses on faculty peer observation of teaching, and emphasizes its importance in the development of teaching excellence. UTEP was one of the leaders in addressing peer observation when the Teaching Effectiveness Committee of the UTEP Faculty Senate asked the Center for Effective Teaching and Learning (CETaL) and Instructional Support Services to develop a resource booklet that was published in 2006 (see Roberson et al, 2006.) (Attached)

Roberson, et al (2006) emphasize the important role of peer observations in assessment. Assessment of teaching means taking a measure of its effectiveness. Formative assessment is measurement for the purpose of improving it. The committee emphasizes the important role of faculty peer observation of teaching in the formative process of improving teaching excellence across campus. Summative assessment is what we normally call evaluation for the purpose of annual evaluation, salary raises, awarding of promotion or tenure, and continued employment.

The committee acknowledges that faculty peer observation of teaching is also part of summative evaluation of teaching for annual review, third year review, etc., and recommends that such peer observations are conducted by a teaching evaluation committee, the chair of the department, or director of the program adhering to the same best practices as are employed in formative assessment. More details and points of caution about implementing formative and summative evaluation processes are described by Roberson et al (2006).

Peer observation as an assessment of teaching means taking a measure of teaching effectiveness. As such, peer observation can include many elements related to (1) preparing to teach (course design, lesson plans and instructional materials, assessment strategies and techniques, etc.); (2) performance in the classroom; (3) evaluation of the impact of teaching strategies on student learning outcomes; and (4) revision to ensure continuous improvement of the course. Peer observation can significantly contribute to the improvement process above and beyond student evaluations of teaching, because faculty peers are aware of the departmental teaching mission, the program learning outcomes, and the structure of the curriculum.

In view of the university's mission, the purpose of a policy on peer observation is to foster a culture of teaching excellence through collegial dialogue and collaborative engagement, using a scholarly approach to enhance teaching and learning. Specifically, peer observation at UTEP serves to

- Create collaborative practices among faculty members related to teaching;
- Stimulate discussion and foster dissemination of best practices in teaching and learning;
- Encourage reflection and innovation related to teaching and learning;
- Communicate the importance of teaching excellence to students and other stake holders; and
- Identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats related to teaching and learning and develop action plans to address them.

Development and implementation of a policy represents a win-win opportunity in which *faculty teaching* is enhanced by collaborative faculty development, and *student learning* is enhanced through systematic improvement of teaching.

Therefore, the Teaching Effectiveness Committee recommends adoption of the following:

Policy on Faculty Peer Observation of Teaching

- All academic departments and programs, with extensive consultation from faculty members, engage in faculty peer observation of teaching on a regularly scheduled basis determined by their respective faculty members.
- Peer observation is organized and managed by departments with a named individual (the chair/director of department/program or a nominee) responsible for the process.
- Process and procedures for the formative evaluations should be determined by the respective department/program, with reference to peer observation materials available through CETaL.
- Departments will designate faculty members who will serve as peer observers. Faculty members who serve as observers should receive significant service credit.
- A department may choose to adopt or adapt one or more of the numerous peer observation processes and instruments that exist (see Roberson et al, 2006). CETaL can

provide advice on the process and instruments (See attached). A unit may develop its own.

- The department's chair or program director is responsible for ensuring that the faculty discuss the process on an annual basis as an integral part of program learning outcomes assessment and identify issues that need further attention and improvement.
- Teaching assistants, graduate student instructors and part time faculty making a significant teaching contribution may be observed at the discretion of the department.
- Departments are permitted and encouraged to produce their own guidelines on peer observation of teaching to better suit their context in accordance with and to supplement this policy, while following best practices.
- It is the responsibility of the Colleges and School to ensure that this policy is implemented in all academic departments and programs.

Guidelines for Development of Unit-Specific Processes and Procedures

- Each unit (college, school, or department) should develop its own processes, procedures, criteria and standards for peer observation based on the policy guidelines that are appropriate for the discipline, the department's context and the course format (e.g. lecture, lab, experiential, on-line, one-on-one, studio).
- Academic units should define "peer" for their purposes and determine whether a peer can be of higher, equal, or lower rank and/or drawn from different departments, but should ensure that observers are trained to perform their task well.
- Each unit should specify the frequency and format options for faculty peer observations of teaching and timelines for both formative and summative assessments, for example:
 - Junior faculty: At least once a year.
 - Tenured faculty: Once every three years.
 - Entry level, non-tenure track faculty: Once a year.
 - Senior non-tenure track faculty: Once every three years.