** PREPARATION FOR PEER OBSERVATION**

**How do you prepare yourself—and your colleagues—for a peer observation of your teaching for formative purposes?**

 ***An effective process of peer observation includes the following components.***

1. **Preparation activities by sharing** of relevant course materials with the observer, at least 2-3 days before the observation: syllabus; lesson plan; planned future quiz or exam on relevant material, handouts, slides, etc.
	* Guiding Questions:
		+ Syllabus: where are you currently in the schedule? How do the preceding activities lead into the observation day? How will the activities of the observation day prepare students for the rest of the semester?
		+ Lesson Plan: what are the learning outcomes for the session? What is the “warm-up” activity? What content is to be covered and what learning activities will the students experience? What time is assigned to each activity; how did you decide on that? How have you sequenced/scaffold the activities? How will you assess what the students are learning and understand? How will you prepare them for the next session?
		+ What instructional technology are you using and how does that help the students learn? How are you using Blackboard to help students engage with the materials outside of class?
		+ What observation tool(s) do you agree on using? Has the observer been trained on the tool(s)?
		+ Will you use videotaping? See issues related to this approach in UTEP guide book.
		+ Can the observer interview the students at the end of class? If so, what questions should be asked and how? See focus group issues in UTEP guide book.
2. **A face-to-face “pre-observation” meeting** at least one day before the observation, between observer and observee. A meeting just before the class is less effective than an advance meeting.
	* **How should a pre-observation meeting be structured?** In the pre-observation meeting the instructor needs to be able to explain what will be happening in class and why. The observer needs to understand the instructor’s expectations for what will happen in class. The instructor also needs to tell the observer the kinds of things to focus on: delivery, classroom management, student response, etc.
	* To ensure useful observations by a peer, you will need to be able to communicate to your observer the answers to the following questions, so your peer’s observations will be relevant to the context of your own (and not his/her) teaching.
3. What are the learning outcomes for the students in the lesson being observed? What changes do you want students to undergo? What skills, knowledge, and perspectives will they be developing?
4. What will be the Observee’s role (his/her own function) in the process?
5. What has the Observee chosen to do and how does this choice connect to the learning outcomes and the Observee’s role?
6. What are the Observee’s expectations for what students will actually do, and for what will actually happen in the classroom?
	* 1. What is the Observee’s management plan for the class; what will the instructor/students do; when; with whom; why?
7. How will the Observee know if you have been successful?
8. What does the Observee want the Observer to specifically observe and look/listen for? What aspects are of significant interest?
9. Will the Observer be introduced to the students? If not, why not; if so, how?
10. Where will the Observer sit? What is the best vantage point for the purpose of the observation?
11. Can the Observer interact with the students if they are involved in independent group work?
12. **The observation**, with note-taking by observer.
	* These notes should resemble those of an anthropologist or ethnographer observing a distinct culture. The purpose of the notes is not to simply identify problems but to record accurately what happens in class, whether positive or negative. The observer should also write down analytical questions (“Why did you do that?” for example) that occur to him/her at particular moments in class, for discussion with the instructor afterward.
13. **Reflection by both parties.**
	* Both observer and observee need to schedule time to reflect—separately—after the observation based on the purpose of the observation and its objectives. The Observer needs to analyze his/her notes and identify the primary themes for discussion. The Observee needs to self-assess, and plan questions for the observer that could be used to help analyze the experience.
14. **Face-to-face Debriefing Meeting.**
	* A written assessment alone is inadequate in a formative evaluation. The point of this second meeting is to share perspectives on what happened, and to reach greater insight on why things occurred the way they did. The observee should state what he/she observed in the classroom experience from the instructor’s perspective; the observer should offer corroborations where appropriate or additional observations and analysis that help the observee more accurately assess the experience.
	* The Observer should refrain from making judgments, but focus on simply presenting observations in an objective manner (as much as possible) to engage the Observee in reflection and forward-looking planning of improvements.
	* The Observer should provide honest opinions when asked for them based on your reading of the literature, personal experience, understanding of the context and the students, and knowledge of the instructor and his/her position, skill level, etc..
15. **Written Assessment (optional).**
	* Depending on how the Observee wishes to use the assessment, a write-up is a possible final step in the process. An Observee *might* want to document a peer observation as part of a teaching portfolio. However, whether or not to use a formative peer observation in a summative assessment has to be the free decision of the Observee.
	* A record of the observation can be important in telling the “story” in the future for third year review, tenure/promotion review, award application, grant application.

## What should you do if you are invited to observe a colleague’s teaching for formative purposes?

1. Well in advance of the observation, request relevant course materials from the observee. Review them before the pre-class observation. These materials are most likely to be the course syllabus, a lesson plan for the targeted class meeting, copies of exercises and assignments to be used in this particular class meeting, and some sample quiz or exam questions that will be used to test students on this part of the course.
2. Insist on meeting face-to-face with the colleague before the event to be observed.
3. Discuss and make sure you understand your colleague’s values and self-image as a teacher.
4. Ask for an explanation of what your colleague will be doing, and why.
5. Ask your colleague to predict what should happen in class.
6. Ask your colleague to explain what his/her measurement of success will be for what happens in the observed class meeting. (How will you both know if he/she has been successful?)
7. Ask your colleague to indicate special issues or concerns that he/she wants you to pay attention to during the observation.
8. Insist on meeting with the observee after the visit.