



Course Observation Guidelines

Most course observations involve pre- and post-observation discussions between the observer and the instructor. A pre-observation conversation builds trust and ensures that the observer understands the instructional context. A post-observation debriefing should highlight effective instructional practices, as well as collaborative identification of improvements. The following can also be used to guide a written summary by the observer.

Pre-Observation Conversation

In a pre-observation meeting, the observer should gather information from the instructor about their goals for the session or module, students, and teaching style. Questions to consider asking the instructor:

- Briefly, what will be happening in the class I will observe?
- What is your goal for the class? What do you hope students will gain from the session?
- What activities will allow students to reach these goals?
- What can I expect you to be doing? What teaching methods will you use? What role will you take?
- What have students been asked to do to prepare for this class session or module?
- What was done in earlier sessions to lead up to this one?
- Will this session be generally typical of your teaching? If not, what will be different?
- Is there anything in particular you would like me to focus on during the session?

Details such as the date and time for the observation, course location (if in person), use of a particular observation form or method, seating arrangement for the observer, introduction of the observer, contingency plans in case a change in plans is necessary, should also be decided by mutual agreement at this session.

Post-Observation Debrief

The post-observation meeting will be most productive if the instructor is permitted to speak first about the class session. Encourage the instructor to discuss positive aspects of the session first. If successful aspects of the session are not discussed first, they might not be discussed at all. Most instructors want to focus on changes, successful aspects of their teaching need to be recognized so that they can be continued.

Instructor being observed:

1. What instructional strengths did you demonstrate in the class session?
2. What changes would you make in the way that you conducted the class session?
3. What additional questions or concerns do you have about this observation?

Peer observer:

1. What instructional strengths did you observe in the class session?
2. What changes would you suggest for the instructor to improve the class session?

Additional Questions:

1. What were the benefits of this process? (e.g., what did you learn about teaching? Were any ideas about teaching reinforced for you?)
2. What changes would make this peer observation process more helpful?
3. Were there any surprises for you in this process?
4. Do you have any questions or concerns that you would like the academic unit to address?