

Report of the Committee on Implementing Peer Review of Teaching Wayne State University

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Background

The peer review of teaching process began in earnest with faculty organizing teaching portfolios to include course content, syllabi, reports of classroom observations, and summaries of student results; prior to this, faculty performance was primarily evaluated using student surveys (Bernstein, 2008). An American Association of Higher Education (AAHE) sponsored project, *From Idea to Prototype: The Peer Review of Teaching*, promoted the sharing of resources and knowledge of the peer review of teaching process among 12 universities (Fernandez, 2007). The peer review of teaching process has evolved over the years as specialists conducted research on best practices to assess faculty teaching to promote student learning. Currently, universities are moving toward systems in which faculty review each other's teaching and provide feedback to improve student learning (formative assessment). In some institutions, data from this process is included in personnel decisions (summative assessment).

A peer review of teaching process has at least two aims. One is to expand faculty awareness and collaboration in use of excellent teaching practices. A second is to bring together faculty with exceptional teaching ability to help other faculty improve the quality of their instruction. Essentially, a peer review of teaching process facilitates collaboration between faculty members to promote student learning. Although traditional student evaluations can be useful in gauging the atmosphere of a classroom, an instructor's ability to guide a course and disseminate knowledge is best judged by a colleague who is familiar with the course content and skilled at teaching. Published results demonstrate that many faculty think peer review programs are beneficial (Maeda, Sechtem, & Scudder, 2009). Furthermore, the implementation of peer review programs at other universities has resulted in improved student performance when faculty acknowledged feedback from the peer review, and changed their instruction accordingly (Bernstein, Johnson, & Smith, 2000).

Peer review of teaching at WSU

Wayne State University committed to a systematic application of peer review of teaching with the contract between the University and the AAUP-AFT in 2013. In particular, Part A of Article XXIX of the contract states:

Within six (6) months of the ratification of this Agreement each unit shall determine a process for peer evaluation of teaching, including classroom observation, that best fits the style(s) of teaching (classroom, laboratory, practical, etc.) practiced by the discipline(s) represented in the unit. (American Association of University Professors and the American Federation of Teachers with Wayne State University, 2013)

Although the Contract said there must be peer review of teaching, it did not spell out how to do that, and the original timeline proved to be unworkable. Therefore, this Committee was established, to provide general guidelines for each unit to use in establishing their own process of peer review of teaching. This document is a report of this Committee's recommendations.

Early department-based efforts to implement peer review of teaching were made available to this committee, such as the policies adopted by the Department of History, as well as initial considerations from the Department of Psychology. In addition, a Department Chair Workshop in April, 2014, provided models and suggestions from presenters experienced in designing and administering successful peer review of teaching programs. These materials served as an important basis of the committee's work to develop resource materials for departments.

Committee Charge

Based on review of a wide range of national models of peer review of teaching at similar institutions, the committee developed recommended protocols by which departments can implement peer review of teaching. These protocols are intended as suggestions and tools for departments; they are not prescriptive. Because faculty within their disciplines are the authorities on content and instructional methods in their fields, departments are best positioned to develop peer review of teaching procedures most appropriate to their members' needs. Departments can most effectively mobilize disciplinary expertise to help faculty members achieve their full potential as teachers. The protocols suggested by the committee are intended to support, rather than to direct, departments' decision making.

Committee Members

The committee consisted of two faculty members appointed by the AAUP-AFT, two department chairs appointed by the Provost's Office, a facilitator and peer-review expert, and an Associate Provost (*ex officio*).

Bob Arking is a Professor in the Department of Biological Sciences and Vice-President and Contract Implementation Officer for the AAUP/AFT.

Rita Casey is an Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology and the Faculty Grievance Coordinator for the AAUP/AFT.

Gwen Gorzelsky is Associate Professor in the Department of English and Director of the Composition Program.

Joseph Hummer is Professor and Chair of the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering.

Mathew L. Ouellett is Associate Provost and Director of the Office for Teaching and Learning.

John D. Vander Weg is Associate Provost and Associate Vice President for Academic Personnel.

Committee Work

This committee was convened in the spring of 2014 and met four times over the spring and summer months to review resource materials, investigate similar peer review of teaching initiatives at peer institutions, and to compile general recommendations on how to begin to implement a peer review process appropriate to the Wayne State University context. The members of this committee unanimously endorse this report.

A Formative Process

Peer review of teaching at Wayne State is a formative process. As such, peer review is meant to provide a faculty member with feedback on teaching performance solely for the purpose of the faculty member's own improvement, with the goal of improved student learning; data gathered during a formative review is typically not shared with anyone other than the faculty member being reviewed (LaLopa, 2012). Specifically, only one faculty reviewer should be involved in the peer review process; this reviewer should share the results of the peer review with the instructor only. This approach helps build confidence among faculty that the review process supports teaching improvement, rather than serving as a form of monitoring.

Having been reviewed, faculty may include the written products of the review in their P&T documents or include them in the materials submitted as part of their annual reports for selective salary review if they choose to do so. Including or omitting peer review documents in a P&T dossier or annual reports should not have any positive or negative implications on those processes and decisions at any level.

A peer review of teaching program at WSU is meant to allow a faculty member to gain a better sense of his or her teaching, and to help the faculty member hone his or her teaching practices. It may complement but is not a substitute for or replacement of the Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET).

Recommended Protocol

Departments may use or change these recommendations as they deem best, so that their unit process most effectively supports faculty development as instructors in the specific discipline. Faculty within a department may begin thinking about their own peer review process by setting an aspirational vision. It is productive for faculty to start by asking what they want out of the process and how they will know that the process is helping. It is equally useful for departments to engage faculty in ongoing discussion of this vision and how to implement it. For example, a department might form a peer review committee or sub-committee and ask its members to develop department-specific recommendations, seek feedback on those recommendations from the whole department, and incorporate useful suggestions. This approach will increase faculty confidence in their leading role in designing department-specific peer review procedures. Emphasizing departmental/unit level participation is particularly important, given that the peer review process is contractually mandated.

Departments must also decide how to initiate and continue the peer review process through ongoing years. The time it involves will likely be distributed over some extended period, particularly for large units, and the burden of the process on those serving as peer reviewers must be considered so it does not impinge on the central research and teaching work of faculty. It is also likely that unit processes will benefit from ongoing revision and refinement based on participants' feedback and assessment.

The Office for Teaching and Learning (OTL) has gathered selected resource materials that may be helpful to units as they develop their processes, in addition to the citations at the end of this report. These materials can be accessed at <http://www.otl.wayne.edu>. Additionally, the OTL staff is available to facilitate workshops on how to structure and conduct effective peer observations of teaching for departments and programs.

After achieving agreement on a procedure among departmental faculty, departments should include a brief description and general outline of the procedure for peer review of teaching in their bylaws and other appropriate policy documents.

Peer review of teaching is a contractually mandated process at Wayne State—tenure-track and tenured faculty must be reviewed. To make reviews most useful for faculty, we recommend conducting them in at least the second, fourth, and tenth year in which a faculty member is employed at WSU. These provide feedback in advance of typical promotion milestones but with enough time to absorb the results and make positive changes. Faculty members may also request peer reviews at any other time *they feel it would be personally useful*.

At the beginning of each academic year, department chairs or their designees should compile a list of faculty members scheduled for or requesting review. The chair or designee should also ask the faculty for volunteers willing to serve as reviewers that year if asked.

Faculty being reviewed should provide the chair with a list of up to three possible reviewers drawn from those willing volunteers within the department or in another department if that results in a more comfortable fit. The chair will contact the reviewers to ask if they will serve as the peer reviewer. Possible peer reviewers may decline the review, in which case the chair will contact other volunteers from the list submitted by the faculty member being reviewed.

The following statements describe important concepts or practices that are found in successful Peer Review of Teaching programs:

1. The Peer Review of Teaching process promotes student learning
2. Faculty (and chairs) should engage in a discussion of what minimum criteria would define effective teaching, and ensure that their rubrics, checklists, etc., include those factors
3. A collegial relationship between and among faculty is essential to the success of the Peer Review of Teaching process
4. All feedback should be constructive and as specific to the individual lecture as possible—Peer Review of Teaching is a non-judgmental process.

A very general overview of a possible process of peer review is outlined below, adapted from Fernandez, 2007. Departments may wish to include more detail in their adapted procedures than the general description given below. There may well be honest differences of opinion within a department as to whether the specific attributes of the Peer Review of Teaching program devised by the faculty fulfills the goals of the Peer Review of Teaching process as laid out in this document. This possibility underscores the importance of embedding a plan for ongoing assessment and feedback in the unit processes.

1. Review of Course Materials
 - The observer examines examples of materials used in the course to assess the teacher's perception of what is important in the course, as well as the teacher's pedagogical style, the context of this particular learning activity, and how the class meeting to be observed fits into the stated learning outcomes of course.
2. Pre-observation Consultation
 - The observer meets with the teacher prior to observing the teacher in class to discuss the course materials, course goals, specific teaching strategies, and how the class meeting to be observed fits into the design of the course as a whole.
 - The teacher has the chance to inform the observer of what aspects of teaching the teacher would like the observer to take note.

- In this pre-observation consultation, it will be helpful to share any particular checklist or other framework that will guide the peer observation process as part of the formative process.

3. Teaching Observation

- The observer sits in on a mutually-agreed teaching event (a lecture, discussion section, lab, etc.) making notes and paying particular attention to the aspects the teacher had previously mentioned.
- As one option, the observer may use an agreed upon checklist and/or scoring system as a framework to insure that all important aspects of teaching are noted. In addition to the option of developing a unique form, several examples of such checklists can be found on the OTL website at <http://www.otl.wayne.edu/>. The use of a checklist is not intended to preclude the observer from attending to points not listed as the feedback most useful to the person being observed will focus on what that person has determined would be helpful to their growth. Rather, using a checklist may help remind the reviewer of the wide range of relevant behaviors that contribute to good teaching. Departments can tailor the recommended checklist to priorities determined by faculty discussions used to develop peer mentoring procedures.
- Students should be informed simply that there is a visiting faculty member sitting in on the class that day.
- We do not recommend a survey of students be conducted as a part of the peer review process, because students already have the opportunity to provide feedback through other formative (the OTL Mid Semester Assessment Program) and summative (Student Evaluations of Teaching) processes. The Peer Review of Teaching process is designed to emphasize peer feedback, unavailable through other means.

4. Post Observation Consultation and Feedback

- The observer meets with the teacher sometime after the teaching observation to revisit areas of focus from the pre-observation consultation.
- The observer solicits the teacher's perceptions about how the class meeting went, both in terms of what approaches were successful and where challenges arose.
- The observer and teacher review any notes and checklists the observer completed while observing the course.
- The observer and teacher should discuss particular actions the teacher can take to improve teaching.
- It is important that observer feedback on teaching be as specific to the teacher or course as possible, with specific examples from the teaching observation cited during the discussion. The discussion must also be conducted in a supportive, non-judgmental manner by the observer.

5. Documentation

- Soon after the post observation consultation, the observer should provide the teacher with a final set of notes, checklists, and recommended actions.

- Because peer review is formative at Wayne State, the only documentation from the reviewer to the department chair at the end of the review process is notification that the review has been completed and that the observer's feedback was discussed with the teacher.

Reviewers can include evidence of their participation in the process in the teaching or service parts of their annual reports and should receive due credit. As noted above, teachers may, at their own discretion, note in their annual review and / or promotion and tenure materials that they participated in peer review of teaching and in what capacity.

Role of Office of Teaching and Learning

The Office for Teaching and Learning is a resource for WSU faculty that emphasizes pedagogical innovation, champions inclusive course design and assessment methods, and advocates best practices in the implementation of instructional technology in traditional, hybrid, and online environments. To this end, the OTL sponsors a variety of individual consultation services and department and campus wide workshops. To assist departments in running a peer review of teaching process, the OTL will supply examples of applied resource materials (e.g., class observation checklists, discussion worksheets, tips for being observed, tips for peer observers, etc.), examples of peer review materials developed by WSU colleagues, a selected annotated bibliography on faculty peer review, and suggested guidelines that may be helpful in the development, implementation and assessment of peer review processes in programs and departments. The OTL provides consultation services to departments and programs as a complement to the disciplinary expertise of peer reviewers. Additionally, the OTL can support units during the process of defining and establishing their peer review processes, help prepare colleagues to be peer reviewers, and support feedback and assessment measures as the program unfolds. More information about the WSU OTL services can be found at <http://www.otl.wayne.edu/>.

For example, at the end of the second year of operation of Peer Review of Teaching program, the Provost may want to gather feedback on how well peer review is working. Reviewers, reviewees, chairs, and perhaps students can be asked to contribute feedback via a range of methods suitable to the unit (e.g., email, poll, selected focus groups, etc.).

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