Working Draft (for faculty review and implementation, Fall 2015)

Faculty Peer Observation of Teaching Policy
Department of Political Science and Geography (8/15)

Overview

In 2013-14 the Faculty Senate and the Provost planned and implemented guidelines for a Faculty Peer Observation process. Departments were asked to develop their own policies and practices and put them in place by September 2015. Departments were asked to consider particular and individual needs of faculty, to consider the need for mentoring (particularly of new faculty), to guard against creating personal conflicts or disagreements, to reflect on a variety of instructional delivery methods, and to contemplate variations in discipline-specific teaching methods.

As recommended, “The goal of the peer observation process is to improve teaching methods and student learning and should serve primarily as a tool for mentoring and professional development. The peer observation process should foster a culture of teaching excellence through collegial dialogue.” The outcome of the peer observation process should be a summary report that reflects on the teaching methods of an individual under evaluation and recommendations or steps to be taken to enhance teaching and student learning.

This department policy incorporates guidelines from the Provost’s and the COLFA Dean’s offices (see their respective web pages). In order to meet the Provost’s need to implement this policy during the Fall 2015 semester, this working draft serves as a preliminary guideline for our department but it will be reviewed for possible revisions and subsequently approved by the voting members (as defined in the Bylaws) of the department. Once approved, this policy will be posted on the POL/GRG website.

The COLFA Dean’s guidelines on peer observation practices were developed from the UT System-mandated and Provost’s peer observations guidelines. Consideration has been given to these guidelines as baseline requirements, but the department may or may not extend them to apply to other teaching venues, such peer observations for purposes of annual merit evaluation and the improvement of teaching not subject to System, Provost, or College guidelines.

Principles

Following are important principles set out in the COLFA guidelines that are hereby adopted and made applicable in the Department of Political Science and Geography:

- Time and effort devoted to peer observations should be commensurate with the actual utility of the observation results.
- 3rd year review reports in COLFA must include peer observation reports.
- Peer observers will be T/TT faculty in the same department as the instructor observed.
Department Chair, in consultation with the DFRAC, determines if circumstances warrant the addition of one or more observers from another department.

Course to be observed will be selected by the Department Chair in consultation with the instructor.

Attached brief observation form will guide the process and responses.

A minimum of two peer observers must observe a minimum of two different classes.

Timelines will accommodate established UTSA Third-Year Review and Promotion and Tenure DFRAC reporting deadlines.

Guidelines for DPS&G peer observations

1. Who will be observed?

> All Tenure Track faculty seeking promotion and tenure review must show evidence of peer observations of teaching, including individuals with administrative appointments of 50% or less. Additional criteria: Assistant Professors may be reviewed once per year but no less than once prior to their 3rd year review and one additional time prior to tenure consideration. A faculty member may request additional observations. Associate Professors must be reviewed at least once prior to seeking promotion to Full Professor. Associate and Full Professors must be reviewed once during each CPE review cycle (HOP 2.22, Comprehensive Periodic Evaluation of Tenured Faculty).

> All Non-Tenure Track (NTT) personnel in the ranks of Lecturer I and II shall be reviewed once per year.

> All Non-Tenure Track (NTT) personnel in the ranks of Lecturer III, Senior Lecturer, Distinguished Senior Lecturer (and others listed in the Provost’s guidelines) shall be reviewed once during each period of employment (most likely every 3 years).

> Anyone undergoing a mandatory Third Year Review beginning with the review process commencing in January 2016.

> Anyone undergoing a Comprehensive Periodic Evaluation (CPE), including individuals with administrative appointments of 50% or less.

2. Who can serve as a peer observer?

Eligibility to serve as a peer observer: Only tenured members of the department may serve as observers for untenured TT faculty. Untenured TT faculty members may serve as observers of non-tenured (NTT) faculty. In the case of promotion considerations to full professor or CPE reviews of associate professors, only full professors may serve as observers. In the case of CPE reviews of full professors, only full professor may serve as observers. Peer observers must have earned a rating of “meets expectations” or better in teaching in the two most recent merit review exercises. Peer observers will be T/TT faculty in the same department as the instructor observed. The Department Chair, in consultation with the DFRAC, determines if circumstances warrant the
addition of one or more observers from another department. Observations by non-faculty experts cannot substitute for peer observation.

At the beginning of each academic year, the Department Chair and the Department’s DFRAC shall work together to compile a list of faculty who are to be observed and a list of faculty who will serve as peer observers. In drafting a proposed list, the Chair will consider information about leaves of absence, time conflicts, and other timeline/availability circumstances. Given the number of observations that must be accomplished in this department (X faculty observed (times) Y (2) observations), the Chair may wish to split the number of observers and observations between fall or spring semesters, such as all TT faculty in fall and all NTT faculty in spring. During approximately the first 2 weeks of August each year, the Chair puts together a list of faculty to be observed in the forthcoming year and a recommended matching list of eligible observers (and specific class/time information) (see below). This list will be sent to the DFRAC in the first week of classes. Both the Chair and the DFRAC should take care to balance the workload/time required for the observers to conduct observations. DFRAC reviews the list, recommends adjustments, and returns the list to the Chair. With the DFRAC’s recommendations in hand, the Chair then seeks acceptance of the observer assignments from the faculty member(s) to be observed and any additional input or adjustments that must be considered in preparing the final list. The Chair resolves all reasoned objections and all other types of considerations as to assignments of observers and may reassign observers if necessary.

Each faculty member to be observed must be provided with a minimum of 2 observations by 2 separate observers.

3. Timeline for actions to complete peer observations:

The Chair and the department’s senior administrative assistant monitor the processes and steps to ensure that the following actions are taken in timely fashion:

> At least two weeks before the first day of classes, the Chair provides faculty members to be observed with the department’s guidelines. The Dean’s, the Provost’s, and the Department guidelines are posted on the Department web page.

> At least one week before the first day of classes, the faculty member(s) to be observed provides the Chair with certain key information: course numbers that he/she would like to have observed, and a list of at least 5 possible meeting dates during the semester when they might be usefully observed, leaving out test days, guest lecturer days, etc. Dates must fall between the 6th and 12th weeks of the semester.

> In the first week of classes, the Chair proposes to the DFRAC a list of eligible peer observers and a matching list of proposed assignments of eligible observers, course numbers for classes to be observed, prospective dates of observation, dates/timeline for completion of all observations, and date by which final reports are due.

> The DFRAC’s list (with any recommended changes) must be returned to the Chair no later than the 3rd week of classes. The Chair then notifies the peer observers with those to be observed as to who will conduct observations, in which classes, and on which dates.
> No later than the 5th week of classes, peer observers meet with those to be observed to discuss teaching materials and set firm dates for peer observations. Observers should be provided with information concerning any instructional items that may be relevant to the particular class sessions that will be observed.

> Peer observations should take place no sooner than the 6th week and end no later than the 12th week of the semester. Peer observers are required to write a report following the observations that includes the information listed in section 5 below. Observers may include additional information as appropriate.

> Within 1 week of the observation (whenever it occurs during the semester), the peer observer and faculty member must meet to discuss the peer observations and the report. The peer observer should provide the faculty member with a copy of the report and provide oral feedback about teaching strengths and possible areas of improvement of teaching effectiveness. Both the peer observer and the faculty member must sign the peer observer’s report, and a signed copy must be submitted to the Chair to be included in the faculty member’s file.

> Using the attached reporting form (Appendix A), observers must provide complete information regarding the following items:

A. Name and signature of Faculty Member
B. Name and signature of Peer Observer
C. Name and course number of observed class
D. Date of observation(s)
E. Date of post-observation meeting
F. The report should reinforce strengths in the faculty member’s performance and should provide any recommendation for improvement and/or potential resources for improving teaching effectiveness, if applicable. The faculty member may provide additional narrative information as appropriate.
G. The written report is due to the Chair within one week of the classroom observation or within one week of the final observation if multiple observations should take place. The Chair files the report with the faculty member’s record and ensures that reports are appropriately included in the records submitted for faculty going up for tenure/promotion, 3rd year review, or CPE.

> The faculty member should submit a signed written response to the Chair no later than the last day of classes of the semester of observation. The response may summarize the peer observer’s report and offer views about their teaching strengths and areas in which he/she will try to improve. Peer observers may see the report if the observed faculty member is under official review.

5. Training requirements and options available for peer observers.

The Department’s DFRAC in consultation with the Chair shall specify whether or not there are requirements for training for peer observation. Peer observers should be directed to any available options for training, even if not required.

As noted, all cases for mandatory third year reviews, promotion and/or tenure, and comprehensive periodic evaluations must include evidence of peer observation in the form of the report as described.

When the peer observer is a member of DFRAC, the peer observer may discuss their report with the DFRAC as part of the committee’s deliberations, just as they might discuss their observations of the faculty member’s contributions along other dimensions of teaching, research, and service.

Faculty serving on the DFRAC, CFRAC, and UFRAC should always focus on factual information. Any significant deviations between the peer observer’s comments to DFRAC and faculty member’s report(s) must be justified and reconciled by the Peer Observer. The DFRAC should discount any comments that cannot be reconciled.
Appendix A: Lecture/Seminar Course Observation Review and Report Form

The University of Texas at San Antonio
Department of Political Science and Geography

Faculty Observed: ____________________ Signature: ____________________ Date: _________

Observation date(s): ____________________________

Peer Observer: ____________________ Signature: ____________________ Date: _________

Name/course number of observed class: ________________________________

Date of post-observation meeting: ____________________

Possible areas of observer consideration: clearly presented ideas; critical thinking applications; students’ prior knowledge; definitions of terms; sources recommended; class preparation; connections with previous classes; organization/objectives; transitions & summaries; use of time; active engagement; Q&A; feedback from students; respect; confidence/enthusiasm; eye contact; articulation and pronunciation; mannerisms/language; technology applications; websites/clips/videos; outlines/handouts; pace of delivery; voice projection.

Develop an overall narrative evaluation that captures observer’s perspectives on good and excellent areas of presentation:
Develop an overall narrative evaluation capturing observer’s perspectives on areas that were least effective and could use some improvement in the presentation:

F. The report should reinforce strengths in the faculty member’s performance and should provide any recommendation for improvement and/or potential resources for improving teaching effectiveness, if applicable. The faculty member may provide additional narrative information as appropriate.

This report can be the same report provided to the faculty member. The department chair files the report with the faculty member’s record and ensures that reports are appropriately included in the records submitted for faculty going up for tenure/promotion, 3rd year review, or CPE.