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

Overview

“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 steps to be taken to enhance teaching and student learning.

This department policy follows incorporates guidelines from the Provost’s and the COLFA Dean’s offices (see their respective web pages). 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

The 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?

   Assistant Professors must be reviewed twice prior to their 3rd year review and twice prior to tenure consideration by two different observers. A faculty member may request additional observations.

   Associate Professors must be reviewed twice by two different observers 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) faculty must be reviewed once every three years.

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. 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.

3. **Timeline for actions to complete peer observations:**

At the beginning of the fall semester prior to 3rd year reviews and the spring semester for tenure, promotion, or CPE review, 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. The Chair will put 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.

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. The following timeline should be followed whenever possible:

> 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 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 not 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.

4. **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.

5. **Consideration of peer observation for Promotion and Tenure, Third Year Review, and Comprehensive Periodic Evaluation.**

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: ________ 
print name

Observation date(s): ________________________________

Peer Observer: ___________________________ Signature: ____________________ Date: ________ 
print name

Name/course number of observed class: _____________________________________________

Date of post-observation meeting: ____________________

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

The peer observer might consider some of the following items:

1. **Content/learning objectives:** (Are objectives for the class given verbally or in writing? Are main ideas clear and relevant? Is the content accurate? Are higher order thinking skills promoted? Are new ideas connected to students’ prior knowledge?)

2. **Organization and preparation for class session:** Is the instructor prepared for class? Is the class connected content to previous classes? Does the instructor use clear, effective transitions with summaries? Is instructional time used well?)

3. **Classroom interactions and educational climate:** (Are students and instructor interested and enthusiastic? Does the instructor use student names? Is humor used appropriately? Does instructor treat students with respect? Is the atmosphere of the classroom participative?)
4. **Effective communication:** (Is the delivery paced appropriately? Can the instructor be seen and heard? Are explanations clear to students? Are examples, metaphors, and analogies appropriate? I as the instructor stimulating and thought provoking? Is the instructor confident and enthusiastic? Does the instructor use adequate eye contact with students? Does the instructor use clear articulation and pronunciation? Does the instructor avoid using distracting mannerisms and language?)

5. **Use of Media and instructional materials:** (Do films, websites, and other audiovisual materials have a clear purpose? Are handouts appropriate in number and subject? Does the instructor give help with reading or using the text, if necessary? Does the instructor use technology proficiently?)