Mechanical Engineering Peer Teaching Evaluation Guidelines¹ and Peer Observation Protocol (for RPT and Merit)

2022-02-17

Observation Guidelines

Peer observations should be done in a way that promotes improvement. The peer observation protocol for formative annual feedback, and letter for summative evaluation, should be written in the spirit of being formative (i.e., provide constructive criticism, areas for improvement, areas of excellence, etc.), with the opportunity to use engagement in the observation practice for summative evaluation purposes. The goals of peer teaching evaluation is to have peer observation letters available to faculty for tenure and promotion cases, provide a formative process for continuous improvement of teaching, and create a culture of community around teaching with monetary support for observers for time and effort spent. Per expectations from the Dean’s office, departments should employ multiple measures for evaluation of teaching with scholarly tools.

Frequency of Observation

1. All faculty (pre-tenure, associate, full, instructors, postdocs, and lecturers) with teaching responsibilities should be observed at least once every academic year.
2. To be useful, the observation should be done in the first ⅓ of the semester.
3. The frequency of observation listed here should be understood as the minimum requirement. Additional observations can be requested by the faculty member or the Department Chair.
4. A three-year running average of observations will be used for evaluative purposes for RPT (Reappointment, Promotion and Tenure).
5. Completion of an observation will be given credit for annual merit purposes.

Program Management

Faculty who serve as observers will receive $300 for each completed observation letter. Administrative support will assist with initiation of peer observations, requesting allocation of funds to observers’ accounts, tracking who has completed observations, and submission of letters to personnel files. The Personnel Committee is charged with receiving information from administrative support regarding who has participated in a peer observation and the letters themselves in the case of RPT. The faculty member observer and observee will coordinate with each other their schedules for observation.

¹ Developed by the University of Colorado Boulder Dept. Of Mechanical Engineering Teaching Quality Framework Departmental Action Team (Jean Hertzberg, Jana Milford, Todd Murray and Daniel Knight) working in partnership with the CU Boulder Teaching Quality Framework Initiative (https://www.colorado.edu/teaching-quality-framework/) with sponsorship by the National Science Foundation (DUE-1725959) - any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the NSF.
Selection of Observers

Selection of observers will be initiated by a survey going to all faculty at the beginning of semester that asks:

- Which class, which semester do you want to be observed?
- Whose teaching do you admire? Please suggest 3 possible observers.
- How many observations are you willing to do for others?

Within the first few weeks of the semester, the survey results will be analyzed by an administrator/within faculty staff meetings to pair observers with observation requests. Within the first month of the semester, pairings will be sent out to the observer and faculty to be observed.

Procedure for Classroom Observations

Before your observation:

1. The observer should talk to the faculty member in advance of the observation in order to understand the objectives for that class and how it fits with the overall course and to provide an overview of the observation to be conducted. Conversations to consider can include: What is the best/most important/most fun aspect of the course? What issues are you facing this semester?

2. Faculty members are required to provide their observer with the course syllabus, and may provide other materials they deem relevant, including access to the learning management system, lesson plans, assessment materials, or outlines explaining the pedagogical goals of classroom activities.

During your observation:

3. The observer should review and use the Peer Observation Protocol found at the end of this document to capture notes, thoughts, and recommendations related to the classroom observation. The Protocol is a guide; not every box must be checked.

After your observation:

4. The observer should meet with the observed faculty member after the classroom observation but prior to submitting their letter to resolve any questions of factual data, discuss concerns or questions the faculty member or observer may have, and to provide formative and constructive feedback to the faculty member. Ask first if suggestions are welcomed. Start with strengths and frame criticisms as questions of “why do that”. Conversations to consider can include: What might you want to do/change?

5. The observer should review their notes/evidence from the peer observation protocol, syllabus and other materials shared with them, and their meetings with the faculty member and prepare a letter summarizing the observations and assessments. Note that most letters include some suggestions for improvement - it is not expected that any class would ever be perfect.

6. The peer observation letter should be submitted to both Kassie Van Pelt and Elizabeth Deacon, who
will initiate the observer’s payment. The peer observation protocol should be retained by the observer for their records. A copy of the letter and protocol form should also go to the faculty member observed.

**Guidance for Evaluators of Letters**
The letter written by the observer of the faculty can be used as a multiple measure of teaching evidence for several dimensions of teaching, including but not limited to: goals, content, and alignment of a course; preparation for teaching; methods and teaching practices; presentation and student interaction; student (and other) outcomes; mentorship and advising; and reflection, development, and teaching service/scholarship. Letters should also speak to guidance or areas for improvement as well as strengths of the faculty’s teaching practices.

**Merit-Specific Considerations**
For merit purposes, faculty who request and have an observation completed will receive credit for having an observation done.

**RTP-Specific Considerations**
Evaluations from the past three years of observations can be used for comprehensive reappointment, promotion, and tenure uses. A letter from the observer will be needed for use in these cases.
You have been asked to complete a peer observation for an ME faculty member for inclusion in their reappointment, comprehensive review, promotion, or tenure case. Please note that not all boxes need to be filled, instead consider which are most appropriate for what was observed.

Please complete the following steps for your peer observation:

- Request and review the syllabus and other materials for the course prior to your classroom observation.
- Please talk to the faculty member in advance of the class period you will be observing to understand the objectives for that class and how it fits with the overall course and to provide an overview of the observation you will be conducting.
- Use the “Evidence / Notes” boxes to make notes regarding each question during the lesson and your discussions. Please check NA if a particular item does not apply to the class.
- Review your notes/evidence and discuss your observations and suggestions with the faculty member. Then prepare a letter summarizing your observations and assessments. Note that most letters include some suggestions for improvement - it is not expected that any class would ever be perfect!
- Please retain this protocol for your records and turn in your letter to both Kassie Van Pelt (department HR administrator) and Elizabeth Deacon (POP staff support). Only the letter will be included in the candidate’s promotion and tenure materials.
- This protocol form and letter can be retained by the observed faculty for purposes such as reflection towards FRPA completion for annual evaluation of teaching or for RPT statements

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<th>Observer:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instructor:</td>
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<td>Course Name:</td>
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<td>Course Number / Section:</td>
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<td>Date / Time:</td>
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<td>Number of students present:</td>
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<td>General description of course - Hybrid/remote, physical environment, lecture/lab?</td>
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Did the observer receive and review the syllabus prior to class?  □ Yes □ No
a) Did the syllabus include the Required Syllabus Statements (i.e. Disability Accommodation; Religious Holidays; Classroom Behavior; Sexual Misconduct, Discrimination, Harassment, and/or Retaliation; and Honor Code), per CU Boulder policy? □ Yes □ No

b) Did the syllabus clearly describe expectations and requirements for the course, including departmentally prescribed learning objectives, if applicable? □ Yes □ No

*If no in (a) or (b), what was missing/unclear?

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Section A: Environment, Structure, and Implementation

A1) Organized. The instructor’s activities were well organized, structured, and made good use of time.

Evidence / Notes: □ Not applicable

A2) Engagement. Students were on task throughout the class and engaged in learning (e.g., interested in the lesson, active student involvement, etc.).

Evidence / Notes: □ Not applicable

A3) Resources. Resources selected for the class (board work, PowerPoints, etc.) were educationally appropriate and appeared valuable (e.g., used various materials to foster student understanding, such as drawings, graphs, physical materials, videos, etc.).

Evidence / Notes: □ Not applicable
A4) Inclusive Environment. The instructor established a classroom environment that gave all students the opportunity to participate fully (e.g., creates a positive climate that evokes interest and questions from diverse students).

Evidence / Notes: □ Not applicable

A5) Formative Assessment. The instructor took advantage of opportunities to gauge student understanding as the lesson proceeded (e.g., opportunities to ask and answer questions, identify anything unclear, use of clickers, etc.).

Evidence / Notes: □ Not applicable

A6) Active Learning. The instructor employed active learning strategies appropriate for the size and structure of the class (see examples below).

Evidence / Notes: □ Not applicable

Examples of active learning include, but are not limited to:
- Clicker concept questions
- Think-pair-share
- Participatory demonstrations and/or games
- Making time for students to discuss concepts with peers
- Active writing (e.g., minute papers) or speaking (e.g., in class presentations)
- Working through problems, scenarios, and/or arguments with students
- Organizing students for group work
- Routinely asking for and welcoming student input and questions
- Fielding questions in a way that encouraged further discussion
- Demonstrating active listening

Section B: Content
B1) **Content.** The instructor chose examples and details that were appropriate and worthwhile for helping students learn the content in this course.

**Evidence / Notes:** □ Not applicable

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B2) **Accuracy.** Instructor’s written and spoken content information was accurate (information written on board, in hand-outs, and on tests and quizzes).

**Evidence / Notes:** □ Not applicable

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B3) **Depth.** The instructor delivered content and answered questions in a way that was consistent with a depth of knowledge of the subject.

**Evidence / Notes:** □ Not applicable

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B4) **Significance.** During the class it was made explicit to the students why the material is important to learn.

**Evidence / Notes:** □ Not applicable

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B5) **Connections.** The instructor made appropriate connections to other areas of the discipline, or to real-world applications of the topic.
### Section C: Open-ended responses to be addressed in the faculty letter

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>C1) Strengths and positive aspects of the course and/or the instructor’s teaching</th>
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<td>Evidence / Notes:</td>
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<th>C2) Suggestions for the instructor to improve their teaching</th>
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<td>Evidence / Notes:</td>
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